

## **The Arts and Crafts of Literacy**

# **Studies in Manuscript Cultures**



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## **Volume 12**

# **The Arts and Crafts of Literacy**



Islamic Manuscript Cultures  
in Sub-Saharan Africa

Edited by  
Andrea Brigaglia and Mauro Nobili

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Decorators of allon zayyana at work (Sanka ward, Kano, 2008).© Andrea Brigaglia.



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Any remaining imperfections in the volume are solely our responsibility.

This book is dedicated to all the calligraphers, scribes and craftsmen who have been transmitting the various arts of literacy in sub-Saharan Africa.

Andrea Brigaglia, Cape Town, June 2017



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Mauro Nobili

# Introduction: African History and Islamic Manuscript Cultures

The study of Africa has suffered, and still suffers, from many stereotypes. One such stereotype was the assumption that there was no history in Africa before the arrival of the Europeans. After World War II, with the march towards independence of most African countries, a new generation of scholars, both from the continent and abroad, initiated a historiographical revolution that would eventually restore their past to the peoples of Africa. During this phase, scholars considered oral traditions as the authentic means of discovering the past and understanding the present in Africa. Although exceptionally useful, the problem with the drive to study orality as a source of history was that it overlooked a centuries-old tradition of Islamic literacy found in many areas of the continent after the conversion of Africans to the Muslim faith. However, this tradition of Islamic literacy has left a priceless heritage in manuscripts, both in Arabic and in various forms of *‘ajamī* (i.e. African languages written in the Arabic alphabet), which have only recently attracted the attention of scholars.

*The Arts and Crafts of Literacy: Islamic Manuscript Cultures in sub-Saharan Africa*, focuses on this African Islamic literary heritage and offers a holistic approach to the study of manuscripts in Muslim Africa. Andrea Brigaglia and I have gathered twelve contributions presented at the international conference we organized and hosted at the University of Cape Town, 5–6 September, 2013, titled *The Arts and Crafts of Literacy: Manuscript Cultures in Muslim sub-Saharan Africa*.<sup>1</sup> These articles look at the different dimensions of the manuscripts, i.e. at the materials, the technologies and the practices, the communities involved in the production, commercialization, circulation, preservation and consumption, as well as at the texts themselves.

As the Congolese philosopher Valentin-Yves Mudimbe underlines, '[t]he reality of an African history, particularly for the sub-Saharan part of the continent, does not seem to exist, at least academically, before the 1940s.'<sup>2</sup> That Africa has no history was the argument of the famous eighteenth/nineteenth-century philosopher Georg W.F. Hegel. In his often-quoted lectures, published under the title *Philosophy of History*, he uttered the following, powerful statement:

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1 Michaelle Biddle and Alessandro Gori could not attend the conference; nevertheless, their articles are presented here. Halirou Mohamadou's paper was solicited by the editors.

2 Mudimbe 1994, 21.

At this point we leave Africa [...]. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it - that is in its northern part - belong to the Asiatic or European World. Carthage displayed there an important transitional phase of civilization; but, as a Phoenician colony, it belongs to Asia. Egypt will be considered in reference to the passage of the human mind from its Eastern to its Western phase, but it does not belong to the African Spirit. What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History.<sup>3</sup>

Ideas such as those of Hegel went almost unquestioned in the colonial period. Indeed, they proved to be hard to dismiss and partially survived the end of colonialism. For example, the famous historian Hugh R. Trevor-Roper simply follows in Hegel's footsteps. In 1965, he argued that '[p]erhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none, or very little: there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely darkness, like the history of pre-European, pre-Columbian America. And darkness is not a subject for history.'<sup>4</sup>

Trevor-Roper accepts the Hegelian argument almost in its entirety. However, in the post-colonial context, he implicitly echoes a historiographical trend that, at the time, was finally fading away, i.e. that history is exclusively based on written sources. The origin of this assumption can be traced back to the nineteenth-century development of History as an academic discipline and is often associated with a statement in the famous manual of history *Introduction aux études historiques* by Charles-Victor Langlois and Charles Seignobos (first published Paris: Hachette et Cie 1899).<sup>5</sup> According to the authors, '[f]or want of documents the history of immense periods in the past of humanity is destined to remain for ever unknown. For there is no substitute for documents: no documents, no history.'<sup>6</sup>

The idea that history could only be written through the study of written sources started to be questioned by the middle of the twentieth century. One of those who contributed the most to establish the legitimacy of oral sources as valid historical sources was Jan Vansina who, in 1961, published his milestone work *De la tradition orale*.<sup>7</sup> In fact, oral sources had already been used from the moment men started

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<sup>3</sup> Hegel 2001, 117.

<sup>4</sup> Trevor-Roper 1965, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Novick 1988, 39.

<sup>6</sup> Langlois/Seignobos 1904, 17. In fact, the two historians never understood 'document' exclusively as 'written document,' as underlined by John-Edward Philips, but as any vestige that the past has left behind, thus also oral sources and material artefacts (Philips 2005, 38).

<sup>7</sup> Vansina 1961. The book was translated into several languages and eventually a substantially different version was published in the 1980s as Vansina 1985. On Vansina's role in the historiography of oral sources, see Newbury 2007.



preserving the memory of their past. In the case of Africa, Europeans started collecting oral traditions of sub-Saharan Africans from their first contact with local populations. However, these were the works of explorers and later of colonial administrators, not of professional academics.<sup>8</sup> In the words of David Henige, it took Vansina's work to 'justify oral traditions as historical sources, [...] providing a methodological point of departure.'<sup>9</sup> This recognition of oral sources took place in a propitious context, when proper African historiography was developing as an independent discipline, restoring African history to Africans, at the same time as African nations fought the colonial rulers for their independence.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the emergence of an African historiography transcended the boundary of the traditional discipline of history to become a multidisciplinary approach to the study of the continent's past and present, a branch of learning which Mudimbe refers to as Africanism, meaning 'the [entire] body of discourses on and about Africa.'<sup>11</sup> In the context of this "nationalist" historiography, as Toyin Falola and Christian Jennings underline,

[o]ral tradition had the additional benefit of providing a counterpoint to written colonial documents, which were seen as "tainted" with their creators' racism and cultural bias. Newly independent states in Africa were more than welcoming to such pro-African projects, and history departments across the continent set to the task of compiling nationalist narratives of their countries' precolonial past, colonial experiences, and resistance struggles.<sup>12</sup>

From this climate emerged a picture, often accepted in both scholarly and non-scholarly circles, of 'Sub-Saharan Africa [...] as [the] quintessence of orality.'<sup>13</sup> This approach is epitomized by Vansina's statement in his influential chapter of the *General History of Africa* by UNESCO:

The African civilization in the Sahara and south of the desert were to a great extent civilization of the spoken word, even where the written word existed, as it did in West Africa from the sixteenth century onward, because only very few people knew how to write and the role of the written word was often marginal to the essential preoccupations of a society.<sup>14</sup>

A veritable historiographical 'revolution' resulted from the work of scholars such as Vansina, and from the introduction of oral sources as a means of discovering

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<sup>8</sup> On the European 'discovery' of African oral traditions, see Masonen 2000, 436–451.

<sup>9</sup> Henige 2005, 171.

<sup>10</sup> Triulzi 1979, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Mudimbe 1994, 39.

<sup>12</sup> Falola/Jennings 2003, xiii.

<sup>13</sup> Saul 2006, 14.

<sup>14</sup> Vansina 1981, 142.

African history, thus tremendously improving our knowledge of African peoples' past. However, an unexpected side-effect of this climate was the spread of the idea that most African civilizations were "exclusively" oral. Therefore, an old and deep literate tradition in Arabic that followed the conversion to Islam of many Africans living in or south of the Sahara was overlooked in many parts of the continent.<sup>15</sup>

Prior to independence, this tradition, and the Islamic system of knowledge of which it was the product, had already been subjected to a process of disqualification, which was perpetuated by colonial authorities, and which has been highlighted in recent research by scholars interested in African Muslim societies, among them Rudolph T. Ware, Ousmane O. Kane, and Fallou Ngom.<sup>16</sup> With the emergence of nationalist historiographies primarily based on oral history, the African Islamic literary heritage went through a different process of disqualification. Once oral sources established themselves as the authentic source of exploring the African past, then Islam and its manuscripts cannot be considered other than a 'foreign element, an intruder.'<sup>17</sup> More broadly, an alleged natural resistance of African cultures to Islamization, a trope widely employed with a negative connotation in the colonial period, began to be seen as 'a testament to the strength and vitality of African social and cultural systems that resisted the imposition of presumed foreign belief structures like Islam.'<sup>18</sup>

Returning to Vansina's thought, the above quote leaves room for the existence of literacy in the mainly oral societies of Islamic Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa. Nonetheless, the role of literacy remained marginal in the eyes of scholars. Jack Goody expresses this marginality by introducing the paradigm of 'restricted literacy.' This paradigm was first used in a 1963 article with Ian Watt and then expanded in several other publications.<sup>19</sup> Goody specifically applied it to Islamic West Africa

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<sup>15</sup> For example, in the introduction of the excellent collection of essays on literacy in Colonial Africa edited by Karin Barber and titled *Africa's Hidden Histories* there is no reference to the older Islamic literary tradition of the continent, Barber 2006, 1–24.

<sup>16</sup> Ware 2014; Kane 2016; Ngom 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Hamès 2002, 170.

<sup>18</sup> Reese 2004, 2. The idea of the existence of a syncretistic and heterodox form of Islam practiced by Muslim Africans, often referred to as Islam Noir or African Islam, emerged as a colonial stereotype. French scholar-administrators theorized a natural resistance of the Black African to Islam that was based, in the words of Rudolph T. Ware, on the supposed 'religious deficiencies of African Muslims and [...] their biological (or perhaps) bodily predisposition to animism' (Ware 2014, 20). The literature on this topic is extensive and a recent overview of the emergence of this idea is Triaud 2014. For a more in-depth study of how French colonialism created the concept of Islam Noir, the classical study remains Harrison 1988.

<sup>19</sup> Goody/Watt 1963.

in 1968 in his contribution to the edited collection *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, where he states:

Literacy [in Islamic Africa] was restricted in its diffusion, its content and its implications largely because it was a religious literacy, dominated by the study of the Holy Book. Indeed, learning to read at all meant learning a foreign language, Arabic, and the actual techniques of teaching were often more appropriate to oral than to written cultures. But the main factor in restricting the developments in the cognitive sphere was the association of the book with magic and religion, an exclusive, all-embracing cult that claimed it had the single road to the truth. It is above all the predominantly religious character of literacy that, here as elsewhere prevented the medium from fulfilling its promise.<sup>20</sup>

According to these early works of Goody, very influential among scholars of Africa, it is possible to identify several factors that resulted in the restricted spread of literacy. I define these factors as social, functional, educational and technical. Literacy was restricted in its social diffusion because only a very small percentage of the population had access to writing techniques, with literacy becoming a specialized craft of literati who were interested in protecting their exclusive monopoly on it; therefore, Goody describes these societies as ‘oligoliterate.’<sup>21</sup> Literacy was also restricted in its content because of its religious and magical functions, a case defined as ‘limited’ or ‘special’ literacy.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the system of Islamic learning spread in West Africa, whose focus was the study of the Quran rather than the learning of writing and reading, would hamper the development of the full potentialities of writing itself.<sup>23</sup> Finally, in African societies with “restricted literacy,” the implications of literacy were also restricted, according to Goody, due to inherent structural deficiencies of the Arabic alphabet, with its consonantal structure characteristic of Semitic languages.<sup>24</sup>

As a result of the widespread ideas of Africa as a continent of oral cultures or restricted literacy, scholars of Africa, with a few notable exceptions, have seldom used Arabic manuscripts, defined in the mid-1980s by Jean-Louis Triaud as a ‘scientific *no man’s land*.’<sup>25</sup> Overlooking the Islamic literary heritage of large parts of the continent has also been exacerbated by the classical divide in expertise between the training of the traditional ‘Africanist,’ at home with oral traditions,

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<sup>20</sup> Goody 1968, 241.

<sup>21</sup> The term ‘oligoliterate’ comes from Goody/Watt 1963, 313.

<sup>22</sup> Goody/Watt 1963, 313, n. 22. For a detailed study on the ‘magical’ usage of writing in Islamic West Africa, see Hamès 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Goody/Watt 1963, 222.

<sup>24</sup> Goody/Watt 1963, 221.

<sup>25</sup> Mahibou/Triaud 1983, 7, italics in text.

sources in European languages, and archaeological evidence, but usually lacking in the required philological skills, peculiar to the ‘Islamicist,’ who, on the other hand, rarely pays attention to Africa.<sup>26</sup>

The 1990s witnessed the opening-up of African libraries filled with thousands of Arabic manuscripts, and forced scholars to rethink their approach to the study of the continent. The emergence of local Islamic libraries began in the modern Republic of Mali, particularly in the city of Timbuktu. According to Abdul Kader Haïdara, one of the major actors in the promotion of the manuscript heritage in Islamic Africa, this phenomenon was a consequence of the restoration, after the 1991 election, of civil rights in Mali ‘among which [was] the right to establish foundations, companies and private societies.’<sup>27</sup> As underlined by Graziano Krätli, the pattern of ‘disappearance’ and ‘reappearance’ of manuscripts is much more complicated than the one described by A.K. Haïdara, with manuscripts that have been well-known since the colonial period, and others that have only recently disappeared, both in West Africa and in Europe.<sup>28</sup> Charles S. Stewart remarks that the latest wave of interest in the heritage of the region’s Arabic manuscripts is only the most recent in a long line.<sup>29</sup> Stewart adds that, this time, ‘the entrepreneurial activities of an enterprising few African custodians of local literary capital’ attracted the interest of international powerful donors such as UNESCO, the Ford Foundation, the Andrew Mellon Foundation and the London based al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation.<sup>30</sup>

These activities also attracted a non-specialized audience, as proven by innumerable newspaper articles and a few documentaries on the topic, such as the episode ‘Road to Timbuktu’ of the PBS series *Wonders of the African World* featuring the Harvard scholar Henry L. Gates Junior (1999); the Spanish *Fondo Kati, testigo del exilio ibérico en Tombuctú* (2003); the BBC’s *The Lost Libraries of Timbuktu* with writer

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**26** Salvaing 2015. On the subject of Islamicists’ overlooking African Muslim societies, Scott S. Reese underlines that ‘[t]he traditional study of Islam in the Western academy has emphasized the dominance of the so-called Arabo-Persian “Islamicate” center. Under this model, cultural and spiritual ideals spread outward to the large communities of Muslims in Africa and Asia who inhabited the margins. As mere “receptors” of Arabo-Persian learning, Muslim societies in this supposed periphery were regarded as either stagnant – if not decadent – copies of the “pure” faith or wholly localized phenomena whose evolution owed more to local historical, environmental, and cultural factors in the form of pre-Islamic “custom” than their Arabian roots,’ Reese 2014, 18.

**27** Haïdara 2008, 268.

**28** Krätli 2015, 44.

**29** Stewart 2003, 2.

**30** Stewart 2003, 2.

Aminatta Forna (2009); the South African-produced *The Ancient Astronomers of Timbuktu* (2009); or the recent *Sur la piste des manuscrits de Tombouctou* (2015) co-produced by the Bibliothèque nationale de France.<sup>31</sup> In this way, Timbuktu pioneered the awareness of the manuscripts heritage of the whole of Islamic Africa and many new collections of manuscripts have emerged so far throughout the continent. Clear evidence of this new awareness of the written Islamic heritage in Africa are the catalogues of manuscripts from Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa published by the London based Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation;<sup>32</sup> several projects sponsored by the Endangered Archives Program of the British Library focusing on Chad, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, and Senegal;<sup>33</sup> and the work coordinated by the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC, University of Hamburg) on safeguarding collections of manuscripts that have been relocated from Timbuktu to Bamako during the 2012 crisis in northern Mali.<sup>34</sup>

The availability of these manuscripts caused a substantial change in scholars' approach to the African past that has challenged the traditional paradigm applied to sub-Saharan Africa as a continent of "oral societies." On the basis of an extensive reading of these newly available sources, new frontiers of Africa's past have been opened by scholars such as (amongst others) Ghislaine Lydon, who has worked on the trans-Saharan trade;<sup>35</sup> Bruce Hall, who has explored indigenous ideas of race in West Africa;<sup>36</sup> Anne Bang, who has studied Sufi networks in East Africa;<sup>37</sup> and

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**31** For a thorough analysis of the interest around the so-called 'Timbuktu manuscripts', see Triaud 2012. Triaud's article was published before the 2012 crisis in northern Mali that led to the move of several thousands of manuscripts from Timbuktu to Bamako. These events peaked international interest towards the manuscript heritage of the region as testified by several newspapers and magazines articles, as well as popular books, such as Hammer 2016, and the more accurate and scholarly English 2017.

**32** See the section on published catalogues on the website of the al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation: <http://www.al-furqan.com/publications/manuscript-centre/catalogues/>. On the basis of weeks of fieldwork, the Malian scholar Mohamed Diagayeté and I have recently cast doubts on the reliability of the catalogues from Ivory Coast, Ghana, and Burkina Faso (see Nobili/Diagayeté 2017).

**33** For a comprehensive list of projects funded by the Endangered Archives Program, see the grant section on the website <http://eap.bl.uk/pages/grants.html>.

**34** See [https://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/timbuktu/index\\_e.html](https://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/timbuktu/index_e.html). On the CSMC's website are also available handlists of several of these libraries ([https://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/timbuktu/handlists\\_e.html](https://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/timbuktu/handlists_e.html)).

**35** Lydon 2009.

**36** Hall 2011.

**37** Bang 2014.

Fallou Ngom, who has broadened our understanding of the Senegalese Muridiyya brotherhood on the basis of the study of ‘*ajami* sources.’<sup>38</sup>

Testimony to the vibrancy of the Islamic intellectual tradition of Muslims Africans is the series *The Arabic Literature of Africa*, inaugurated by the late John O. Hunwick (Northwestern University) and R. Sean O’Fahey (University of Bergen). The series contains references to works of Muslim scholars active from the early spread of Islam in various regions of Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa. *The Arabic Literature of Africa* has today reached five volumes, the latest compiled by Stewart in 2015, covering roughly the area of contemporary Mauritania, and including references to almost 2,000 authors and their works, both printed and in manuscript format.<sup>39</sup>

Yet, in the words of Shamil Jeppie, manuscripts produced south of the Sahara have been studied almost exclusively by scholars of Africa ‘as sources without exploring the history of the text as an object, born of and part of a network around it.’<sup>40</sup> However, specialists interested in European history have already conceptualized, as Roger Chartier underlines, that every ‘text is always inscribed in something material;’<sup>41</sup> or that ‘reading is always reading something.’<sup>42</sup> This means that every text exists in its ‘dual nature’ as ‘container and content, medium and message, at one and the same time.’<sup>43</sup> A manuscript is both a container of one or more texts, complete or incomplete, as well as a physical object, made up of several components (paper, inks, strings, leather, etc.), assembled with a certain set of skills (calligraphy, illuminations, illustrations, bookbinding, etc.) by specific craftsmen (papermakers, scribes or calligraphers, illuminators, binders, etc.), read, studied, lent, sold, donated, collected, stored and sometimes destroyed or re-used. Each manuscript contains two different types of knowledge, which Krätli has defined as ‘embodied’ and ‘embedded’: one is explicit: the texts, the intellectual dimension of the manuscript, are “embodied” in a specific object; the other is implicit, “embedded” in the physical dimension of the manuscript, i.e. the materials, the tools, the tech-

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<sup>38</sup> Ngom 2016.

<sup>39</sup> O’Fahey et al. 1994; Hunwick et al. 1995; O’Fahey et al. 2003; Hunwick 2003; Stewart et al. 2016. On the Arabic Literature of Africa project, see Hunwick 2008, 303–320. Unfortunately, very few of these works have been edited and translated into English or French; an overview of such editions and translations is available in Salvaing 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Jeppie 2014, 94.

<sup>41</sup> Chartier 1997, 82.

<sup>42</sup> Chartier 1994, 5.

<sup>43</sup> Krätli 2011, 344.

nologies, the practices and the communities involved in the production, commercialization, circulation, preservation and consumption of these documents.<sup>44</sup> In other words, Krätli continues, ‘embodied knowledge is knowledge expressed by and in a particular medium and format, while embedded knowledge refers to the material, technological, economic and cultural conditions involved in the making of a particular object and its component parts.’<sup>45</sup>

Several manuscript cultures have been at the centre of codicological studies for decades. However, Adam Gacek underlines that ‘Arabic manuscripts in the form of handwritten books have hitherto been studied first and foremost as vehicles of thought and not as objects in themselves.’<sup>46</sup> This imbalance between the study of the manuscripts as mere texts and as material objects is slowly being balanced out in the broader context of Arabic manuscripts.<sup>47</sup> Specialized journals like *Manuscripts of the Middle East*, *Manuscripta Orientalia*, and the recent *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts*, emerged from the 1980s. More recently, François Déroche published the first manual of Islamic Codicology in four languages (in chronological order French, Arabic, English, and Italian) as well as his ‘prelude’ to a history of Arabic manuscripts.<sup>48</sup> During the same years, Gacek also published the very useful *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition: A Glossary of Technical Terms and Bibliography* plus its supplement;<sup>49</sup> and *Arabic Manuscripts: A Vademecum for Readers*.<sup>50</sup>

These works on Arabic codicology have dramatically improved the scope of the academic study of Arabic manuscripts. Unfortunately, however, Arabic manuscripts from Africa are barely taken into account in these studies of the Arabic handwritten book. Even those Africanist scholars who actually use these manuscripts rarely pay attention to their physical dimension, focusing only on the text as a source of information. In this regard, Shamil Jeppie remarks that,

[t]he material process of making texts and how these objects were handled – read and reread, often revered, sometimes archived – have been very far from the concerns of historians of Africa. Thus, paper and writing instruments, how texts circulated, how books were held together, and the chain of people involved in the production of texts – from merchants trading

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<sup>44</sup> Krätli 2011, 342–343.

<sup>45</sup> Krätli 2011, 343.

<sup>46</sup> Gacek 2009, x.

<sup>47</sup> Gacek 2009, x.

<sup>48</sup> Originally published in French as Déroche 2000; Déroche 2004.

<sup>49</sup> Gacek 2001; 2008

<sup>50</sup> Gacek 2009.

in papers, to writers and copyists, through communities of readers – are not found in even modest terms in general or specialist works about Africa.<sup>51</sup>

As a challenge to this narrow focus on the textual dimension of manuscripts, Krätli and Lydon's 2011 collection of essays, *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade*, is the first attempt to study West African manuscripts as both containers and physical objects.<sup>52</sup> In Krätli's words,

[a]ny full understanding and appreciation of this unique cultural heritage, let alone any serious attempt at studying or preserving it, should roughly consider all the material, technological, economic, cultural and intellectual aspects of book production, circulation, consumption and preservation in the area.<sup>53</sup>

*The Arts and Crafts of Literacy: Islamic Manuscript Cultures in sub-Saharan Africa* accepts the challenge launched by Krätli for a holistic approach to the study of manuscripts. The articles in the book are grouped into four sections. Section 1 focuses on the writing support. Section 2 comprises contributions on the layout and the margins of Islamic manuscripts from Sub-Saharan Africa. Section 3 brings together essays on different practices of writing and issues of authorship, respectively in Kilwa, Tanzania, Mali, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The last section (Section 4), gathers shorter contributions on different topics related to Muslim written cultures from the continent, namely Cameroon, Mali, South Africa, and Nigeria.

## 1 Writing supports

Regardless of the growing attention paid to Arabic manuscripts from sub-Saharan Africa, there is still very little research on the material supports employed to inscribe these documents.<sup>54</sup> Scholars have pointed to the absence of parchment manuscripts in Islamic sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>55</sup> This contrasts strongly with the extensive use of such writing support in both North Africa and in the highly literate culture of Christian Ethiopia.<sup>56</sup> Sub-Saharan African Muslims normally wrote their manuscripts on paper. Ironically, while parchment would have been easy to produce for

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<sup>51</sup> Jeppie 2014, 94.

<sup>52</sup> Krätli/Lydon 2011.

<sup>53</sup> Krätli 2011, 340.

<sup>54</sup> See Abbott 1938; Brockett 1987; Bondarev 2014b.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, some remarks on this topic, Last 1967, 137.

<sup>56</sup> Bloom 2008, 48–49; Bausi 2008.



local Muslims due to the large amount of animal skin available, paper has always been a foreign technology, not having developed in sub-Saharan Africa until the colonial period. A very basic introduction, based on secondary sources, is given by Johnathan M. Bloom, but several articles by Terence Walz comprise the lion's share on the topic.<sup>57</sup> Walz focuses on types of paper, mainly of Italian origins, which dominated the market in North Africa and made their way to sub-Saharan Africa, namely to northern Nigeria, through the various trans-Saharan routes. Anne Regourd's study of a number of Islamic manuscripts from the Institute for Ethiopian Studies in Addis Ababa confirms the extensive use of Italian paper also in the Horn of Africa, along with other types, most probably produced in Ottoman Turkey.<sup>58</sup> However, generalizing too much on these findings can lead to imprecisions. For example, Nehemia Levtzion has highlighted the presence of northern European papers in Ghana coming most likely from the Gulf of Guinea;<sup>59</sup> and Ghislayne Lydon makes reference to paper from other European countries traded on the Atlantic coast of the continent.<sup>60</sup>

Chapter 1, 'New Strategies in Using Watermarks to Date Sub-Saharan Islamic Manuscripts' by Michaelle Biddle, is a groundbreaking contribution to the study of paper in Islamic sub-Saharan Africa and focuses on the Western part of the continent. As a specialist of paper making, among other skills, Biddle takes the reader into 'an exploration of the hidden,' (p. 30) by which she means the study of the techniques of productions that are crucial for paper analysis. Biddle's article is both a methodological and an analytical study. From the methodological point of view, she advocates a study of paper that combines 'sheet analysis with information to be found in watermark directories, regional, town, family, mill or paper sector economic history and archaeology' (p. 45). However, at the same time, Biddle also provides a comprehensive history of the Galvani Italian paper mills, whose various qualities of paper circulated widely in West Africa from the 1730s well into the twentieth century.

However, paper has never been the only writing support for African Muslims. In fact, most of the process of education to literacy in Muslim cultures has generally taken place using wooden tablets, in Arabic *lawḥ*. Although the ubiquity of the *lawḥ* in sub-Saharan African and, until fairly recent times, in North African Quranic schools is mentioned in virtually all anthropological studies on traditional Quranic

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<sup>57</sup> Bloom 2008; see also Walz 2011 for a synthesis of the author previous studies on the paper in West Africa.

<sup>58</sup> Regourd 2014, xlviii.

<sup>59</sup> Levtzion 1965, 118.

<sup>60</sup> Lydon 2009, 103.

education in the region, a rich chapter in a monograph by Salah M. Hassan represents the only serious study devoted on the *lawḥ* as a tool of literacy and as a cultural object.<sup>61</sup> In Chapter 2, ‘*Fi Lawḥin Maḥfūz: Towards a Phenomenological Analysis of the Quranic Tablet*’, Andrea Brigaglia situates the use of the *lawḥ* in traditional Quranic education in its Islamic religious context. The *lawḥ*, argues Brigaglia, ‘was not only an indispensable practical tool for the transmission of Quranic knowledge, but also the central piece of a complex set of symbols that used to support an educational and initiatory process based on the ritual re-enactment of the myth of the Quranic revelation’ (p.71). Against the argument advanced by other scholars, Brigaglia observes that these initiatory practices are not to be understood as evidence of the supposedly ‘syncretic’ nature of African Islam, but that, on the contrary, they make sense only in reference to the classical theological doctrines about the Quran that they are meant to ritually ‘embody’ or ‘re-enact’ (p.87). Although the article is mainly based on a description of northern Nigerian Quranic schools, the central argument of this paper – which also contains the first attempt to establish a typology of the shapes of the *lawḥ* in various regions of Africa – could be extended to Muslim traditional educational practices as a whole.

## 2 Around the text

The margins of manuscripts have always served as a precious space ‘for different people, readers, authors or copyists, to utilize’, as authors such as Heather J. Jackson have shown.<sup>62</sup> More recently, attention to the margin as an important space of the manuscript, both as text and as object, has also been given to Arabic manuscripts, as seen in the 2011 collection *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources*.<sup>63</sup> This trend is confirmed by the 2016 volume *Tracing Manuscripts in Time and Space through Paratexts* edited by Giovanni Ciotti and Hang Lin that is the first comprehensive and global study of paratexts in several manuscript cultures, also including one contribution, by Darya Ogorodnikova, on ‘*ajamī* manuscripts from West Africa’.<sup>64</sup> However, it was the decade-long research of one of our contributors on the

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<sup>61</sup> Hassan 1992, 148–169.

<sup>62</sup> Jackson 2001.

<sup>63</sup> Görke/Hirschler 2011.

<sup>64</sup> See Ciotti/Lin 2016, esp. Ogorodnikova 2016.

manuscript tradition of Borno (northeast Nigeria), Dmitry Bondarev, which revolutionized our understanding of the margin and interlinear space in West African manuscripts as a locus for recording practices of Islamic learning.<sup>65</sup>

Similar to Brigaglia's article on the *lawḥ*, in Chapter 3, 'Islamic Education and Ample Space Layout in West African Islamic Manuscripts', Bondarev also points to the link between writing practices and Islamic educational practices in the West African context. His contribution is a significant piece of scholarship which increases our understanding of the history and anthropology of Islamic education in West Africa.<sup>66</sup> Bondarev's article explores the correlation between a specific, ample-spaced layout found in many West African manuscripts, and the content of the manuscripts, 'thus demonstrating that practices of Islamic education can be deducted from the analysis of manuscript production' (p. 106). Looking at Quranic and non-Quranic manuscripts from three distinct geographical and cultural areas (Kanuri-speaking Borno; Soninke-speaking Senegambia; Hausa and Fulfulde-speaking northern Nigeria), Bondarev establishes a distinction between interlinear annotations ('glosses'; often in vernacular languages) and marginal annotations ('commentaries'; usually in Arabic). These two types of annotation 'did not result from random opportunistic exploitation of the available space but rather were part of the planned process of manuscript production and use – from the design of the layout to the paratextual exploration of the main text' (p. 137). Challenging an established trend in the anthropology of Islamic education in West Africa, Bondarev argues that a study of the material evidence of the manuscripts suggests that there are three, not two levels of education: not only a first, elementary one where the Quran is memorized on a wooden board and a second, higher one where Arabic texts are studied on paper, but also an intermediate one, where texts are studied in the form of ample-spaced layout manuscripts, often annotated in vernacular languages.

Chapter 4, 'A Preliminary Appraisal of Marginalia in West African Manuscripts from the Mamma Haïdara Memorial Library Collection (Timbuktu),' by Susana Molins Lliteras also approaches the topic of notes on West African manuscripts from a typological point of view. Based on selected manuscripts of the Mamma Haïdara Memorial Library, relocated from northern Mali to Bamako in 2012, the article is the first study of marginalia in manuscripts from Timbuktu. Molins Lliteras provides a comprehensive typology of the marginal notes of these manuscripts, classifying them as addenda, corrections, clarifications, comments and highlights from the

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<sup>65</sup> See, among others Bondarev 2006; Bondarev 2014a.

<sup>66</sup> See especially Brenner 2001; Tamari 2002; Hall/Stewart 2011; Ware 2014; Brigaglia below.

text; ownership marks; as well as separate independent texts.<sup>67</sup> By drawing attention to these paratextual elements of Islamic manuscripts from Timbuktu, Molins Lliteras brings to light ‘the nature of manuscripts as objects of production, circulation and consumption’ (p. 152) and not simply as repositories of texts.

### 3 Writing practices and authorship around the continent

The next three articles are devoted to different African Islamic written traditions, serving different purposes, and written in different Islamic languages.<sup>68</sup> These articles approach texts or corpuses of texts from very diverse angles. Chapter 5, ‘Writing in Africa: The *Kilwa Chronicle* and other Sixteenth-century Portuguese Testimonies,’ by Adrien Delmas focuses on an example of what we may call, borrowing from another of Delmas’ contributions, ‘philological encounters.’ By this term, Delmas means the contact between European imperial powers and newly discovered written traditions.<sup>69</sup> The encounter in question is between the Portuguese and the Swahili-speaking elites of Kilwa, which resulted in the production of the famous *Kilwa Chronicle*. The article contributes to the long academic debate on this chronicle, existing in different versions, in Portuguese as part of the 1550s *Décadas da Ásia* by João de Barros, and in Arabic in a nineteenth-century manuscript preserved at the British Museum. Challenging the traditional approach to the study of this chronicle, which was based on the question of whether the Arabic version was written before the Portuguese one or vice versa, Delmas advances a different interpretation, referring to a ‘co-writing’ of the text (p. 196).

Using this term, the author refers to a process of composition that involves writing down existing materials in one version, the one recorded by João Barros in Portuguese, which then provoked a local response, written in Arabic. Approached in

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<sup>67</sup> The latter types of marginal notes are the topic of another of Molins Lliteras’ contributions, i.e. her unpublished Ph.D. dissertation that focuses on another private library of Timbuktu, the Fondo Kati (Molins Lliteras 2015).

<sup>68</sup> Here I employ the definition of the Italian Islamic studies scholar Alessandro Bausani, according to whom an Islamic language is ‘a language that, at a specific moment in its history, has been deeply influenced, lexically, graphically, and to a certain degree also morphologically, syntactically, and even phonologically by the two main cultural languages of Islam: Arabic and Persian’ (Bausani 1981, 4, translation from Italian by author).

<sup>69</sup> See Delmas 2016, 163–198.

such a way, the *Kilwa Chronicle* is the perfect embodiment of the Swahili-Portuguese encounter that, paraphrasing Delmas, generated writing practices of their own. In this way, Delmas, draws the attention of the reader to the ‘social conditions’ (p. 202) in which the chronicle was written, seeing his own work on the *Kilwa chronicle* in terms of what D.F. McKenzie has defined as ‘Sociology of the Texts,’ or a ‘history of the social, economic, and political motivations of publishing, the reasons why texts were written and read as they were, why they were rewritten and redesigned, or allowed to die.’<sup>70</sup> The context of a conflict of authority between the traditional elite of Kilwa and the newly arrived Portuguese, argues Delmas, generated a highly political practice of history writing that must be taken into account in order to understand the chronicle. In this sense, Delmas’ article can be considered as a parallel to the studies of Paulo F. de Moraes Farias, establishing the political connotations of the famous Timbuktu chronicles.<sup>71</sup>

In Chapter 6, ‘Bamana Texts in Arabic Characters: Some Leaves from Mali,’ the anthropologist and specialist of Bamana oral literature Tal Tamari offers a new, interdisciplinary study of five short texts in Bamana ‘*ajamī*’ that she had originally transcribed and translated in a 1994 publication.<sup>72</sup> In this new contribution, the transcriptions, transliterations and translations of the texts are preceded by a rich biography of Amadou Jomworo Bary, a scholar from San, Mali, whom Tamari identifies as the author of the texts. Moreover, the texts are followed by a cultural interpretation of their content, as well as by a detailed analysis of the writing system used by Bary in the Arabic transliteration of Bamana. These leads the author to a rigorous critique of a recent work on the same texts published by Valentin Vydrin and Gérard Dumestre.<sup>73</sup> Not only were Vydrin and Dumestre unable to identify Bary as the author of the texts, but — Tamari argues — they committed a number of mistakes in their transliteration which led them to consider Bary’s writing system to be ‘far less coherent that it actually is’ (p. 265). On the contrary, the ‘*ajamī*’ system used by Bary for these Bamana texts is, for Tamari, not only the best one ever attested for a Manding language; it is ‘phonologically more perfect than that of most or all other West African ‘*ajamīs*’ currently identified,’ and ‘in terms of vocalic representation, it may also be superior to Persian, Ottoman Turkish and Swahili’ (p. 208). The fact that the author of these texts, who was a Fulbe, was familiar with the long-standing

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<sup>70</sup> McKenzie 2004, 13.

<sup>71</sup> See the synthetic contribution de Moraes Farias 2008. In this chapter, de Moraes Farias expands on his theory of the nature and properties of the Timbuktu chronicles originally formulated in his masterpiece de Moraes Farias 2003.

<sup>72</sup> Tamari 1994.

<sup>73</sup> Vydrin/Dumestre 2014.

tradition of Fulfulde *'ajamī(s)*, and that he was also literate in French, are for Tamar the main reasons for his ability to develop such a sophisticated and coherent system. Thus, the texts studied in this article bear powerful witness not only to the depth of the phonological knowledge involved in the processes of *'ajamī* innovation by African scholars, but also to the multidimensional nature of the linguistic encounter (in this case, not only of Bamana with Arabic, but also, though indirectly, with Fulbe and possibly French), an encounter that takes place whenever a new version of *'ajamī* is created.

Issues of authorship also lie at the centre of Chapter 7, Xavier Luffin's article 'Arabic and Swahili Documents from the Pre-Colonial Congo and the EIC (Congo Free State, 1885–1908): Who were the Scribes?'. The Congolese tradition of Arabic literacy is one of the least studied in Africa. Apart from scattered references in the colonial literature, some of Luffin's earlier works constitute the only serious studies of the topic.<sup>74</sup> These documents, as emphatically stated by the author, 'should change the way we perceive the history of precolonial and colonial Congo' (p. 280). In fact, they demonstrate that literacy in the area predates the arrival of the Europeans, they contribute to our knowledge of practices of diplomacy, and 'they are [also] precious documents for the linguists, since many Arabic documents make use of dialectal Arabic' (p. 281). The known Congolese documents in Arabic script, available in various museums and archives in Belgium, all date from the late nineteenth century and consist, among others, of Swahili treatises, Arabic and Swahili letters, Arabic prayer books, two wooden boards, flags with Arabic inscriptions, and amulets. In this new contribution, the author interrogates the identity of the authors of these, mainly anonymous, writings. Drawing on indirect evidence from a wealth of secondary historical sources, as well as on a careful analysis of these documents, Luffin identifies a variety of possible authors active in late nineteenth-century Congo, who were responsible for the authorship of different categories of Arabic documents: Arab and Swahili traders; the secretaries of Arab and Swahili traders; Arab secretaries at the service of African chiefs; Arab traders at the service of the Europeans; foreign (Arab) secretaries and interpreters at the service of the colonial officers; locals who had learnt the skills of literacy; occasional scribes; and local Islamic clerics active in the Quranic schools documented in Kasongo and Kisangani in the colonial literature. Literacy, concludes the author, was not unusual in parts of Congo in the late nineteenth century. A variety of literate actors from other regions of Africa (the Swahili coast, Egypt, Waday, Darfur, etc.) were active in the area, but 'knowledge of Arabic had started to circulate, though limitedly, in the local population' (p. 294).

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<sup>74</sup> Luffin 2004a, 2004b, 2007.

## 4 Notes

The last section of the book comprises shorter contributions, or notes. The section opens with a note by Halirou Mohamadou, ‘Moodibbo Bello Aamadu Mohammadu and the *Daada Maaje*, a Handbook in an Indigenous Fulfulde Script’ (Chapter 8), which represents a unique contribution to the book. All the other articles, in fact, address cases of literacy in Arabic script. However, several cases of indigenous African alphabets, besides the most well-known cases of Egyptian hieroglyphics, Tifinagh, Ge’ez and its derivatives (Amharic, Tigrinya etc.), are documented in the literature. In 1969, David Dalby assessed the number of indigenous African scripts at fourteen, the best studied being the N’ko writing system for Mande and the Bamun (Cameroon) script.<sup>75</sup> In his highly original note, Halirou Mohamadou introduces, for the first time in the literature, a writing system for the Fulfulde language devised by Moodibbo Bello Aamadu, a twentieth-century traditionally-trained Muslim scholar residing in Maroua (Cameroon). Interestingly enough, as the author points out, ‘with the addition of the alphabet devised by Moodibbo Bello Aamadu Mohammadu here described to those of Oumar Dembélé and Adama Ba already identified by Dalby, Fulfulde holds the curious record of featuring three distinct alphabets’ (p. 300). The rich legacy of literacy in Arabic among Fulfulde-speaking Muslim scholars might be one of the reasons that explain the frequency of their efforts to devise indigenous scripts for their language. After providing a biography of Moodibbo Bello, the author’s contribution focuses in particular on one text, the *Daada Maaje*, a handbook written by Moodibbo Bello, in the form of a syllabary, to teach “his” Fulfulde script. Although this script is not practiced outside of a restricted circle of Moodibbo Bello’s students, this note draws attention to ‘the genius of this local scholar and his tireless dedication and passion’ (p. 307) to promote indigenous literacy in an African language.

‘Elements of a “Timbuktu Manual of Style”’ (Chapter 9) is the combined effort of Shamil Jeppie and Mahamoud Mohamed, a Timbuktu-based scholar and calligrapher better-known as Cheikh Hamou. This note brings attention to the paratextual elements in Islamic manuscripts from Timbuktu, thus creating a meaningful continuity with Chapters 3 and 4. In this contribution, Jeppie introduces and contextualizes a presentation originally given by Cheikh Hamou at *The Arts and Crafts of Literacy* conference. The paper, originally titled *Ilḥāq ḥawla tiqniyyāt al-nussākh* (‘Addendum on the techniques of the copyists’), was itself handwritten in the beau-

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<sup>75</sup> Dalby 1969.

tiful and polished calligraphy of Cheikh Hamou. It explains some of the abbreviations used by copyists in the region of Timbuktu and is based on Hamou's long-time experience with local manuscripts, clarifying 'for the uninitiated some of the elements occasionally encountered in the manuscripts that can confuse a reader or researcher' (p. 310). As Jeppie shows, the paper on the techniques of the copyists is part of the large production of Cheikh Hamou, who might be considered as the last 'traditional scholar' of Timbuktu, 'since he is a product of it and has remained stationed there as a teacher and writer through thick and thin; through the good times and the drought and civil wars and recent rebel occupation' (p. 310).

In Chapter 10, 'Seven Gravestones at the Muslim Tana Baru Cemetery in Cape Town: A Descriptive Note,' Alessandro Gori brings the reader to the southernmost tip of Africa. Starting from the late 1700s, literacy in Arabic script in the region of the Cape of Good Hope, both in Melayu and Afrikaans, has a long history that has been widely documented in the literature.<sup>76</sup> In his note, Gori introduces, transcribes, transliterates and translates, for the first time, seven gravestones in Arabic scripts preserved at the cemetery of Tana Baru in Cape Town, famous especially for hosting the *kramat* (mausoleum) of Tuan Guru, which is still the object of pious visits (*ziyāra*) by the Muslim community of the Western Cape. While the production of manuscripts and printed books in Arabic script in the Cape has received a fair amount of attention, these epigraphs, the author points out, are remarkable examples of a particular form of literacy (the inscriptional form) by the Cape Muslim community that has not so far been studied.<sup>77</sup> These epigraphs are interesting for a number of reasons. From the linguistic point of view, they 'represent an interesting mixture of Arabic and Malay and can shed new light on the relationships between

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<sup>76</sup> The documented journey of Arabic literacy in the Cape started in the eighteenth century with the activities of Tuan Guru (Imam 'Abdallāh b. Qāḍī 'Abd al-Salām; d. 1807), the prince and scholar from Tidore (Trinate, Moluku islands) who famously penned a copy of the Quran from memory while in exile in the Cape, as well as a handbook of Shāfi'ī jurisprudence and Ash'arī theology in Arabic and Melayu, known as *Ma'rifat al-Islām wa'l-Imān wa'l-iḥsān* ('Abdullah ibn Qadi 'Abd al-Salam, *The 'Aqidah of Tuan Guru*, English translation by Rafudeen 2004; see also Rafudeen 2006). After roughly a century of documented literacy in Melayu in Arabic script (see Haron 1997, Haron 2003), this journey leads, in the nineteenth century, to a fascinating case of 'philological encounter' (to borrow once again from Adrien Delmas) with a wave of Afrikaans publications in the Arabic script. The literature on Arabic-Afrikaans is quite vast now. In English, the reader may consult, amongst others, Davids 1987; Stell/Luffin/Rakiep 2007; Dangor 2008; Haron 2014; Versteegh 2015.

<sup>77</sup> An exception is the survey of sixty-five gravestones in the South African province of the Eastern Cape, published by Sugie Harijadi in 2014 for the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia in Cape Town (Harijadi 2014).



these two languages among the Western Cape Muslims' (p. 318). Likewise, the epigraphs prove to be of value for the historian as well, as they 'yield information which can contribute to the enhancement of our knowledge of the prosopography of the Muslims of the city, especially of the local intellectual elite' (p. 318).

The last article of the book, Chapter 11 'Ka'ana Umar's 'CCI Quran': The Making of a Bornuan Manuscript in the Twenty-First Century' by Maimadu Barma Mutai and Andrea Brigaglia, provides the biography of a particular Quranic manuscript, donated by Mutai to the Centre for Contemporary Islam (CCI), Department of Religious Studies, University of Cape Town, on the occasion of the conference *The Arts and Crafts of Literacy*. The manuscript, written by a traditional calligrapher of Borno, Ka'ana Umar, at Mutai's request, was displayed during the conference along with traditional tools for manuscript production in Northern Nigeria. Mutai and Brigaglia's biography of the 'CCI Quran' parallels the works of Ismaheel A. Jeemoh on south-western Nigerian manuscripts, and that, more extensive, of Salah Hassan on the central and western part of Northern Nigeria.<sup>78</sup> This contribution, by following the different stages, the people involved, and the tools employed in manufacture of the CCI copy of the Quran, sheds light on the traditional craftsmanship of Borno manuscript culture, similar to what Dmitry Bondarev did in the documentary 'Borno Calligraphy: Creating hand-written Qur'an in northeast Nigeria' (2015).<sup>79</sup> After providing a biography of Ka'ana Umar, the calligrapher, Mutai and Brigaglia give a description of the pens, the inks, and paper utilized in producing the manuscript, as well as other tools of the calligrapher, such as the board, the page layout marker, the compass, and the inkpot. The authors also outline the role of professional leather workers who manufacture the *baktar*, the term used in Kanuri to refer to the leather bag used to protect and carry Quranic manuscripts.<sup>80</sup>

As Mutai and Brigaglia note in the article, the craftsmanship they describe has been, in recent time, threatened by the circulation of cheap printed copies of the Quran, and, more recently, by the Boko Haram crisis in north-eastern Nigeria. Yet, 'the ancient Quranic manuscript culture of Borno is still alive today' (p. 350). This study of the 'CCI Quran' closes *The Arts and Crafts of Literacy* with a strong testimony of the multiple ways in which the traditional manuscript cultures of sub-Saharan Africa are surviving the challenges of the twenty-first century and remain living traditions until the present day.

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<sup>78</sup> Jeemoh 2007; Hassan 1992.

<sup>79</sup> Available online on the CSMC website at: [https://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/Publi\\_e.html](https://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/Publi_e.html).

<sup>80</sup> For a preliminary study of leather covers and bags used to carry Islamic manuscripts from sub-Saharan Africa, see Viola 2009.

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## Section 1: **Writing Supports**





Michaëlle Biddle

## New Strategies in Using Watermarks to Date Sub-Saharan Islamic Manuscripts

**Abstract:** The paper used in all but a handful of surviving sub-Saharan manuscripts in Arabic script is European in origin. The majority of these manuscripts are undated. From the beginning of European paper production watermarks have been used to indicate a paper's origin. For several centuries these European watermarks have been used to date and authenticate manuscripts by matching a watermark found in undated manuscripts with an identical or similar watermark found in dated sources, usually European, or sometimes Ottoman. Because very few of the watermarks found in sub-Saharan manuscripts appear in these European and Ottoman sources, this approach has been of limited use in dating African manuscripts. Using recent field research on northern Nigerian manuscripts, this paper explores how a holistic interdisciplinary approach combining traditional techniques with those of material cultural analysis and with historical archaeology can provide mill source and dating information. These strategies led to the identification of several mills that produced previously unidentified watermarks and the development of a chronology for Galvani mill papers.



**Fig. 1:** ‘Andrea Galvani Pordenone’ countermark — AGmm6. (Private collection) (All photographs in this article ©Michaëlle Biddle).

# 1 Introduction

For more than a century watermarks have been used as an important component in cataloging, dating, and authenticating books, manuscripts, art work, musical scores, financial instruments and other paper items. The original procedure was to trace watermarks found in European and American printed books and legal documents, some from Ottoman controlled areas, where the date in the book or document could be trusted. In the past these tracings, and later photographs, were then published in books and now increasingly are online, such as the Piccard database.<sup>1</sup> With few exceptions the emphasis has been on pre-1800 watermarks, that is watermarks on hand-made paper, with the majority of those published pre-1700. Whilst the discovery of a watermark very similar to one which a scholar might be trying to date will be helpful, the discovery of a dated, precisely identical mark is analogous to the precise matching of two strings of DNA, and is far rarer. Although thousands of watermarks have been published that number is only a very small part of the total number ever created and used in the production of paper.

Sheets made on the same mould can exhibit enormous variations in marks and in most mills paper was made with a pair of matching moulds. Fiber choices, beating details, couching method, drying times, and how many sheets are dried together in a spur can affect the finished product, as much as does the expertise of the person casting the sheet. This means that no two watermarked paper sheets will ever be identical. Fuzzy logic deals with reasoning that is approximate rather than fixed and exact. With watermarks we are dealing with fuzzy matching — matching that is approximate rather than fixed and exact.

In 2008 I was asked to survey northern Nigerian manuscript collections in order to develop a conservation and preservation strategy. To prepare I reread the pertinent literature — Babinger, Tapiro, paying particular attention to Walz' seminal article on the paper trade of Egypt and the Sudan, Bivar's 'Dated Koran', Brockett's article on the two Leeds' Qurans and others, making note of the watermarks and the manuscripts examined.<sup>2</sup> Walz, who exclusively used countermarks in identifying mills, stated that the majority of northern Nigerian manuscripts 'would appear to date largely from the last quarter of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries'.<sup>3</sup> However, after my survey of twenty collections from Sokoto to Yola, Kaduna to Katsina, my impression based on a holistic analysis of the paper

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1 Hauptstaatsarchiv, Composition J 340, Watermark collection Piccard, Stuttgart. <http://www.piccardonline.de/ergebnis1.php>.

2 Babinger 1931; Tapiro 1968; Walz 1985; Bivar 1960; Brockett 1987.

3 Walz 1985, 41.

sheets, countermarks and watermarks, was that this was not the case. The Jos collection is in disarray<sup>4</sup> and therefore I was unable to locate all of the manuscripts Walz cited, but one of the things I noticed was that, of the manuscripts cited as having the ‘Andrea Galvani Pordenone’ countermark<sup>5</sup>, some of the paper was hand-made, and some of it was machine-made. I was also troubled by the fact that every sheet I saw countermarked with CL, many with the crooked middle moon, was machine-made on a cylinder machine although Brockett had made no mention of that fact in his article on the Leeds’ Qurans. This distinction of whether paper is made by hand or by machine has dating implications, all the more important when there is a dearth of securely dated manuscripts which can be used for purposes of comparison.

As only a small number of the northern Nigerian manuscripts have dates a perennial question has been ‘How old are they?’. After completing a work on inks in northern Nigerian manuscripts<sup>6</sup>, of primary importance in developing conservation protocols, I decided to pursue this question of dating. Walz’ sources — Fedrigoni, Eineder, Heawood, and others — proved to be somewhat unhelpful as many of the watermarks and countermarks I recorded were not to be found in these sources.<sup>7</sup> Online sources were just as uninformative. I am a practicing paper and book conservator and archaeologist of material culture and in particular, an archaeologist of paper and the materials and processes that go into the making of books. In order to preserve and conserve, we conservators find it necessary to learn as much as we can about the details of how materials are created and how they were used. This means that the item — in my case everything that goes into making a book, of which paper is the primary component — is central to our investigations. A basic tenant is that we can understand an object only when we understand how it was made, and we must understand an object before we will conserve it. Bidwell’s and Van der Horst’s articles on the limitations of watermarks, but most particularly Peter Bower’s ‘The White Art: The Importance of Interpretation in the Analysis of Paper’ have shaped and informed my forensic paper analysis and this of course includes watermarks, even with all their limitations.<sup>8</sup>

Each object, each sheet of paper has a story to tell. Within each cover, each book bag, each sheet of a manuscript are traces of their making — in a particular way, at a specific time, by a determinate group. Much of the evidence is visible or

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<sup>4</sup> For details see <http://works.bepress.com/mbiddle/11/>.

<sup>5</sup> Walz 1985, 47.

<sup>6</sup> Biddle 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Fedrigoni 1966; Eineder 1960; Heawood 1950.

<sup>8</sup> Bidwell 1992; Van der Horst 1989; Bower 1999.

is discernible through disciplined analysis – an exploration of the hidden. Other evidence must be gleaned from a wide variety of sources – traditional techniques of recording laid and chain lines, reproducing watermark designs by tracing them, technical paper analysis such as polarized light microscopy and chemical analysis, as well as tracking economic and industrial developments, political conventions, local town and individual paper mill histories.

Replication is another powerful tool. Making sheets of paper from linen and cotton rags with the eleventh century Ibn Badis<sup>9</sup> or a seventeenth century Genoese instruction manual as a guide<sup>10</sup> and watching and working with master papermakers – both European and Japanese – is beyond enlightening. Replication hammers home the necessity of placing the details of measurement, microscopic analysis and any other forms of testing within the context of actual papermaking practice, of industrial developments, and of mill and papermakers' history; otherwise all one will have, is data, or interesting pictures, that tell us only part of the story – or even lead us astray. Making paper by hand was a craft and regardless of all the conventions of the craft we must be aware that there were also atypical practices. Combining scientific data with historical, economic and contextual interpretation can result in crucial and illuminating insights. The stories these sheets of paper can tell us are more than just their dates or where they were made. They reveal aspects of technological evolution, economic infrastructures and state policies interwoven into human networks that literally cross continents.

In the last few decades Italian economic and industrial historians, and archaeologists, have produced a large body of work based on their extensive research into Italian archives and landscape. There is also a considerable quantity of nineteenth and early twentieth century Italian governmental publications and paper/printing sector reports available. When combining technical paper analysis with this information, a holistic historical archaeological approach, I was able to sort out a chronological framework of the various Galvani watermarks/countermark combinations and discovered that there are multiple distinctly different 'Andrea Galvani Pordenone' marks, each with its own date range and each with its own paper sheet characteristics. Such a discovery would not be possible if one only used the marks, but by placing them in the context of evidence from contemporary sources, from industrial history and archaeological investigations, the evidence permits the establishment of a watermark chronology, each with different date-ranges extending over several centuries of paper production.

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<sup>9</sup> Levey 1962.

<sup>10</sup> Fahy 2004.

A narrow focus on countermarks and/or watermarks does not take into account the evidence in the sheets or that paper makers used different watermarks to denote differing qualities of paper; different markets received different papers and that over time, different papermakers used the same marks. For instance, beginning in the late eighteenth century Galvani used the carta *tre lune* with VG or AG to mark lower quality paper and a crest with moon face — *carta reali* — with VG or AG to mark higher quality paper. Relying on countermarks, without consulting archival records, could also lead one to mistakenly identify the BG countermark as Giovanni Berti of Treviso (c.1789–1828), who is recorded in Veneto archives as using GB and GIO BERT but not BG<sup>11</sup>. The BG I found in Jos 83, 257, cited by Walz as Giovanni Berti, is the countermark of the mills of Benedetto Gentile of Ceneda/Serravalle (active 1830–1908), who is barely mentioned in Fedrigoni<sup>12</sup> and does not appear in either Eineder or Nikolaev, but was nonetheless a major exporter to what the Italians called the Levant.<sup>13</sup>

The gains can be immense if watermarks and countermarks, not as singletons but in combination, are studied as only one aspect of a paper sheet and that examination is combined with study extending across many disciplines. My field research has concentrated on manuscripts created in or preserved in the area of West Africa now called northern Nigeria<sup>14</sup> and has been enhanced by a careful examination of western university and library collections dedicated to Africana (Herskovits Library of African Studies — Northwestern University, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Library of Congress, British Library) — 65,000 sheets in just under thirteen hundred manuscripts, out of which fewer than four dozen have colophon dates that can be accepted as valid — that is, where the paper does not contradict the colophon date. For example, Muhammad Bello (1781–1837) could not have written on machine-made Galvani watermarked paper when the Galvani did not start making machine-made paper until the 1890s.

The paper used in all but a handful of surviving northern Nigerian manuscripts in Arabic script is European in origin and much of it is not of the highest quality. In these manuscripts I have found papers dating from the 1650s to the mid-twentieth century whilst the bulk are from the second half of the eighteenth to early decades of the twentieth. More than 90% of these examined papers are of Italian manufacture and of these the majority are from an area north of Venice — the regions of Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Trentino and to a lesser extent Lombardy. Producing

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<sup>11</sup> Walz 1985, 41, 47 n. 48, n. 49, 100 n. 66; Mattozzi 1996, 332; Mattozzi 2001, 162.

<sup>12</sup> Fedrigoni 1966, 241.

<sup>13</sup> Eineder 1960; Nikolaev 1954; Tranchini 1991, 40,43; Tomasi/Tomasi 2012, 178–182.

<sup>14</sup> Listed in Biddle 2008.

paper for export to the Levant, sub-Saharan Africa, the Yemen<sup>15</sup> or Malaysia<sup>16</sup> was a niche business and one that was profitable, and therefore sustainable, only by tight fiscal control over raw materials, labor, equipment and fabrication methods. From the evidence in the paper only a small number of these papermakers were able to sustain this for more than a few decades. In order to minimize transport costs, the ideal for export would have been a thin sheet — requiring a minimum of pulp — an increasingly scarce item — produced quickly.<sup>17</sup>

An important point to remember about Italian papers is that before 1870, what we today call Italy was made up of different polities, each with its own economic history and each with its own papermaking traditions and technological arc. Mid-twentieth century paper from Amalfi, Kingdom of Two Sicilies, is distinctly different from that of Pordenone, then part of the Austrian Empire.

## 2 How paper is made

If we understand how paper is made, we can more accurately use the information we find in paper sheets. Before the advent of machine-made paper in the early nineteenth century, European paper was usually produced by a two or three-person team using a pair of wooden and wire moulds working at a single vat.

From the earliest days in European paper production, watermarks were used to indicate a paper's origin, quality or size. The earliest watermarks, all Italian, are dated to the late thirteenth century.<sup>18</sup> The designs we call watermarks are left in a sheet of paper by wire profiles, twisted into shapes and then sewn on top of the wires, the cover, that make up a paper mould. These moulds were woven by hand, but from the end of the seventeenth century they were woven on a specialized mouldmakers' loom by specialists. The wires that made up watermarks were tied down by other wires onto the mould's cover. In the sixteenth century countermarks began to appear. These were initials or other symbols placed opposite or under the principal watermark. For centuries these marks were personal or trademarks of individual papermakers and mills, but by the late nineteenth century custom-made watermarks were also being used by paper merchants, hotels, corporations and department stores. Neither watermarks nor countermarks were used in oriental or Islamic papermaking.

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<sup>15</sup> Regourd 2008, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Zakaria/De Guise/Abdul Latif 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Rosa 2004, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Ruckert et al 2009, 29.



**Fig. 2:** A typical Italian vat and laid mould in the Cartiera Milano in Amalfi. This paper mill closed in 1969 and was reopened by Nicola Milano in 1971 as the Museo della Carta. His family had been paper makers since the late thirteenth century. (Amalfi, Museo della Carta, 2008).



**Fig. 3:** A sheet of early nineteenth century hand-made laid Italian paper showing a typical layout of an Italian mould with watermark and countermark centred on the mould. (Private collection).

By 1250 the European paper-making mould would typically consist of a rigid wood frame with a surface of fine metal wires running parallel to the longer side of the mould. These fine wires, which produced laid lines on the paper sheet, were tied down with heavier, more widely spaced wires crossing them perpendicularly. These heavier wires produced chain lines on the paper sheet. The wooden frame with the wire mesh was topped with another wooden frame, the deckle. The deckle stopped the pulp from running back into the vat and created a wavy or fringed, thinned edge on the paper's four sides. This fringed edge on a sheet is also called a deckle. Paper made on this type of mould is called laid paper. Recording the precise position of a watermark in relation to the chain and laid lines is important since placement was as much a trademark as the watermark and countermark.<sup>19</sup>

These moulds, and the watermark wires attached to them, deteriorated rapidly as they were constantly in water for ten to twelve hour days, six days a week. In addition, the mould was scrubbed daily to remove fiber residue, resulting in a gradual change in the shape of the mark. There are various estimates of how long moulds might last but the actual length of time a mould will last is determined by how it is used. I own a paper mould with a 'Government of India' watermark/countermark that dates to the twentieth century and, having been used in a limited way, it is in pristine condition. However, two to three years is commonly cited as the life of a common-sized (480 × 340 mm) paper mould<sup>20</sup> but, given the number of drifting or cocked watermarks appearing in African manuscripts, it is not unreasonable to assume that they were used for more than two years.

Until the nineteenth century European paper was made of pulp derived from cut-up rags, ropes, sails — primarily linen, cotton and hemp — macerated and beaten into fibrillated cellulose fibers. These fibers were added to water — the foremost requirement of papermaking is vast quantities of clear, soft water — creating a pulp which was scooped from a vat with the rigid hand-held mould. The resulting mat of fibres was then transferred from the rigid mould to a wool felt or couched. When a number of quires, six quires or 144 sheets is a common number but this varied by region, were on felts, the post was then pressed free of water. The sheets were then separated from the felts and hung to dry on strings or wooden racks in a spur, often bundles of six or eight sheets. After drying the sheets, still in bundles of six or eight, were dipped into thin glue made from animal or fish scraps, called sizing, and then dried again. It was possible for two workers at one vat to make up several thousand sheets of paper during a twelve-

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<sup>19</sup> Loeber 1982.

<sup>20</sup> Ruckert et al 2009, 13.





**Fig. 4:** This c.1890s Carl Lustig of Pordenone sheet (Falke 2623), made on a cylinder machine, illustrates a cocked watermark. The middle lune is drifting as the tie-down wires have come loose through use.

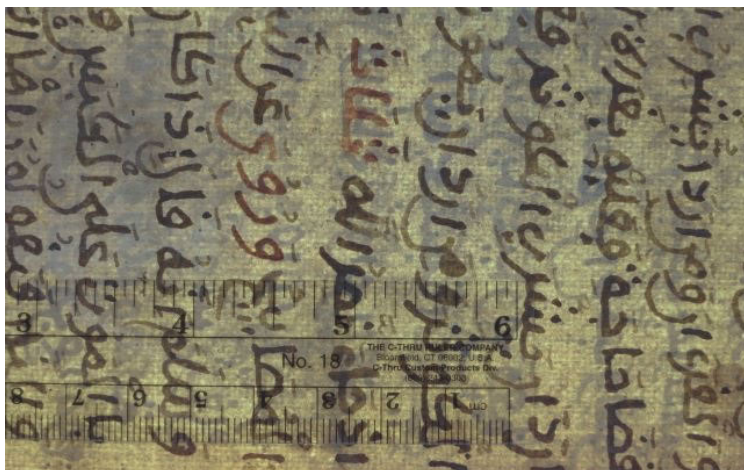
hour workingday.<sup>21</sup> Depending on their quality the sheets might be pressed or polished or not. The paper I have found in manuscripts created in northern Nigeria is rarely polished and, when it has been polished, it is usually roughly or incompletely done, with no trace of *ahar*, a coating that was used extensively in the Islamic heartlands, which seals a sheet's pores and takes a high, glossy polish.

This division of paper into multiples of six or eight reflects the ease with which the human hand can easily manipulate the sheets. We see traces of this in African manuscripts in that the watermarked paper is often found in groups reflecting that a single sheet was cut into four pieces. The result is four, eight, twelve, sixteen or twenty-four sheets that can be matched up to recreate the original single sheets and sometimes even the original bundles of six or eight. This fact tells us that the paper sheets were transported folded and not flat and is also another indication that at least some of the paper was not subject to sheet-by-sheet quality control, not surprising given the uneven and sometimes very poor quality of the paper in these manuscripts.

In 1757 another type of mould, made of finely woven wire mesh, began to appear.<sup>22</sup> This type of paper is called wove paper and in time it too was often watermarked. It has no laid lines although in early sheets a mesh pattern may be found (Fig. 5). There is also an early nineteenth century transitional paper – wove with chain lines – that was popular with Italian papermakers.

<sup>21</sup> Ruckert et al 2009, 13.

<sup>22</sup> Loeber 1982, 23.



**Fig. 5:** Wove paper (Private collection).



**Fig. 6:** Shadow zones adjacent to chain lines disappear by c.1800. This sheet is French c.1740. (Private collection).

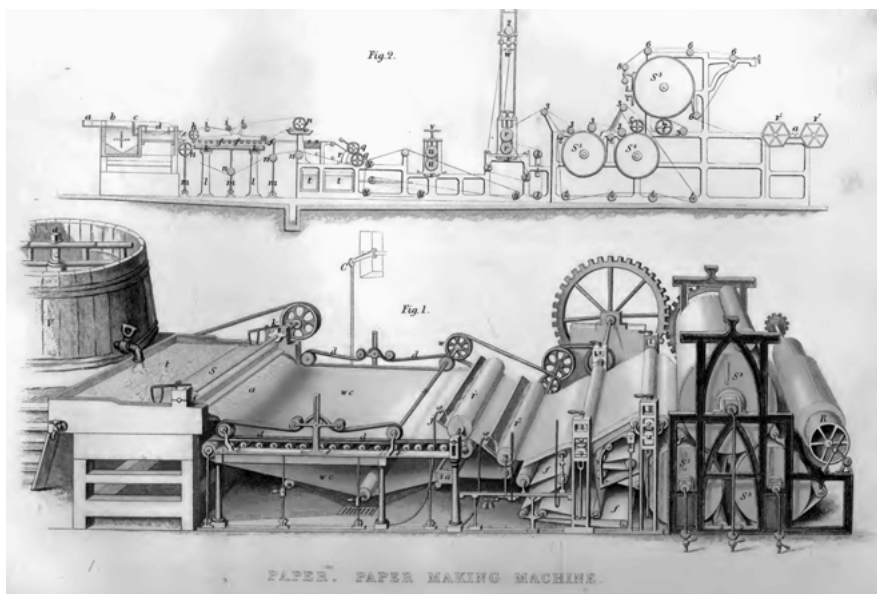
Between 1750–1800, papermakers separated the wooden supports that lie a few millimeters behind the mould's wire cover, causing the common shadow zones on both sides of the chain lines to disappear by c.1800. This was sufficient to create a uniformly good sheet. Paper formation or lookthrough is said to be good or closed when the paper is regular with a uniform surface and good opacity. It is cloudy or wild when the fibers are unevenly distributed and produce shadows. A cloudy sheet is the result of a paper mill either not doing a precise job of separating its rags

or of incomplete maceration. Flocs are clumps of fibers inadequately fibrillated, most commonly comprised of cotton lint or vegetable matter. In some eighteenth century Italian papers these flocs can be so substantial that they can be picked apart with a pin to create puff balls on the sheet's surface. Paper formation is akin to a paper mill fingerprint, as is the location of the watermark and countermark on the mould, the distance between chains lines, how many laid lines lay within a certain measurement, the bulk or thickness of the sheet and the fibers used in the sheet. All these factors provide context for watermark analysis.



**Fig. 7:** A cloudy sheet, uneven in its formation, with a grass stem inclusion. (Private collection).

In the eighteenth century, as the demand for paper grew and rags became increasingly scarce, papermaking was transformed. There were experiments with replacement for rags or bulking additives including hemp, spinning mill waste such as cotton lint, straw, sugar cane waste — bagasse, agricultural plant matter, esparto grass — *halfah* or *hiflah*, wood — spruce, balsam, fir, pine, poplar — and minerals such as calcium carbonate and gypsum. There were experiments with short-cuts in washing felts or not washing felts. Bleaching agents were developed that enabled papermakers to bleach dirty or dark rags, as well as to bleach printed and written paper for recycling into white paper. Sizing experiments led to a change from using animal or fish glues and gelatin combinations to alum-rosin. The development of practical papermaking machines — there are two types: continuous (Fourdrinier) and cylinder (the Italian *al tamburo*, *al tondo* or *cilindro*) — took decades but meant that large quantities of paper could be made easily and quickly by fewer people.



**Fig. 8:** A mid-nineteenth century continuous Fourdrinier machine. (Tomlinson 1855, plate between 364 and 365).

However, these papermaking machines, and attendant industrial processes, required large upfront investment of capital and space. Continuous machines are complex and very large. Continuous and cylinder machines can and do produce both laid and wove sheets. We find all types of paper in northern Nigerian manuscripts — hand-made laid and wove, continuous laid and wove, cylinder laid and wove.

There was considerable regional variation in the adoption of these new technologies. In 1883 it was reported that there were 227 mills making paper by machine and twenty-two mills by hand in England — a ratio of ten machine mills to one hand mill — whilst in the same year, just in the area north of Venice, there was only one mill making paper by machine and thirty-nine by hand — a ratio of one to thirty-nine.<sup>23</sup> There is no doubt that the mid-nineteenth century decades-long unification process in Italy followed by the Long Depression of 1873–1896 impacted papermakers' industrial modernization efforts, but the details of when a mill adopted a cylinder or continuous machine or started to add ground wood to their paper can help us in dating their watermarks in the paper exported to

<sup>23</sup> Bryan 1883.

sub-Saharan Africa. Contemporary trade publications reveal that Italian mills initially favored cylinder machines, undoubtedly due to their smaller size and lower complexity.<sup>24</sup> Most Italian paper mills were family owned and only a relative few went on to adopt continuous machines. Some became joint stock companies like Cartiera Bernardo Nodari e Cie in Lugo or Cartiera Rossi of Arsiero, both of which exported extensively to the — to use an old catchall term designating the *Dar as-Salam* — the ‘Oriente’ market.<sup>25</sup>



**Fig. 9:** Dandy rolls (with detail) produce watermarks and countermarks and can easily be changed on both cylinder and continuous machines. These machines can also produce large quantities of paper from the same dandy roll and the same roll can be used for decades. (Musée Canson-Montgolfier, Annonay, France, 2013).



To add to the complexity, watermarks can be made not only with hand moulds but on either a cylinder or a continuous machine with a dandy roll. In the mid-1820s John Marshall of T.J. Marshall of London developed a cylindrical roller that could be attached to either a continuous or a cylinder machine. This dandy roll could make an impression of laid and chain lines upon the sheet of paper or pulp as it exited the machine. These rolls were added because they speeded-up the draining of water from the paper sheet. In 1830 Thomas Barrett of St. Mary Cray,

<sup>24</sup> *Annuario* 1884, 358–378.

<sup>25</sup> Fontana/Sandal 2001, 89–98.



London, obtained a patent for inserting the watermark and maker's name on continuous paper.<sup>26</sup> Dandy rolls were not in wide spread use until the 1840s but by 1860 even complex light-and-shade marks were being produced. Initially watermarks were hand-tied to the dandy roll, just as on a hand mould, but by the 1870s solder was usually used to attach the watermark to the wire cover of the roller.<sup>27</sup> In the machine-made era papermakers use dandy rolls not only to watermark paper for the mill that produced the paper but also produce and watermark paper for merchants, as is the case with the Beniamino Arbib and Ydlibi marks<sup>28</sup> (Fig. 10), and for organizations, such as the CMS crest for the Church Mission (Missionary) Society. All three of these watermarks — Arbib, Ydlibi and CMS — and others of this type appear in northern Nigerian manuscripts.



**Fig. 10:** The YDLIBI watermark/countermark combination made by a dandy roll on machine-made paper. (Falke 14).

<sup>26</sup> Tomlinson 1855, 367.

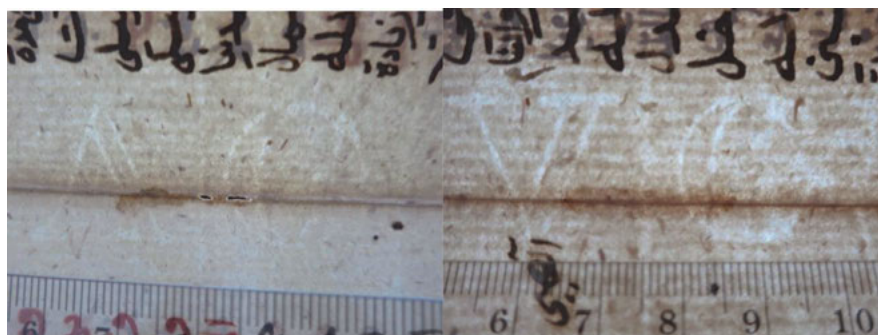
<sup>27</sup> Herring 1860, 29; Hunter 1947, 400–408.

<sup>28</sup> Biddle forthcoming a.

Another complicating factor with sub-Saharan manuscripts is their unsewn structure. Many larger northern Nigerian manuscripts contain combinations from various mills and sheets are found shuffled with watermarked sheets from one mill immediately followed by countermarked sheets from another mill. This makes sheet analysis all the more important if one is to determine which countermark belongs to which watermark but it also hints at the layers of complexity in the codicology of these manuscripts.<sup>29</sup>

### 3 Distinguishing hand-made from machine-made paper

The side of a sheet marked by the hand mould is called the ‘wire’ side. The other side, which is usually smoother, is the ‘felt’ side. In hand-made paper the laid structure is part of the mould so that the laid and chain lines, and the watermark/countermark, are transferred to the wire side of the paper. This is important in reading countermarks in sub-Saharan manuscripts as sheets were cut into four, slicing through the most common placement of the countermark in northern Italian papers. VG can easily be read as AC if sliced in half and read from the wire side (Fig. 11).



**Fig. 11:** The same countermark viewed from the wire side (left) and the felt side (right). (B/AR4/3).

<sup>29</sup> Biddle forthcoming b.

In contrast the laid structure of continuous machine-made paper is transferred to the felt side, the smoother side. Early cylinder machine-made paper resembles hand-made in that the laid lines and watermark appear on the wire side of the paper. The wire side of most hand-made papers should be easy to perceive in raking light and one might think that this is an easy way to distinguish hand-made from machine-made paper. In fact it is often difficult to determine because by the mid-nineteenth century heated drying rolls were added to continuous machines, pressing both sides of the paper sheet, and in northern Nigerian manuscripts sheets are additionally pressed by cyclical high humidity and traditional storage methods that tightly compress and smooth the sheets. Paper makers sometimes created their marks on dandy rolls in a mirror image (Fig. 9).

Continuous machines typically create two deckles but c.1905 cylinder machines could create four<sup>30</sup> as in hand-made paper. In continuous laid paper the pulp tends to consistently hug one side of the laid lines but in cylinder laid paper the pulp can mimic that of hand-made paper and often lie somewhat evenly between the laid lines. But in hand-made paper there are imperfections; it lacks the machine-made consistency of pulp distribution found in continuous and cylinder paper. In both continuous and cylinder machine-made paper the grain of the paper, the direction in which the fibers line up, is stronger in the machine direction whilst in hand-made paper it is practically equal in both directions. This latter fact is the most easily applied in efforts to determine whether paper is made by hand or by machine. Taking advantage of the fact that sub-Saharan manuscripts are unbound, laying a sheet of paper over the edge of a table and comparing the deflection provides a clue as parallel to the grain the resistance is far less than against the grain. If a grain can be detected, but it looks like hand-made paper, then it was probably made on a cylinder machine.

## 4 Date of production vs. date of use

The date of production of paper sheets and their date of use can be decades apart. Heawood states that Denham used paper that was six to seven years old.<sup>31</sup> Gacek believes that a gap of 10–15 years is possible.<sup>32</sup> While some remnant sheets might survive unused for a lengthy period of time in Ottoman chanceries or scriptoria

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<sup>30</sup> Hunter 1947, 368.

<sup>31</sup> Heawood 1950, 31.

<sup>32</sup> Gacek 2009, 292.



in monasteries, this does not appear to be the case with pre-twentieth century writers in northern Nigeria. Paper, good for writing with soft African reed (*qalam*), could be scarce and from travelers' and ethnographic accounts — Denham, Clapperton, Barth, Nachtigal, Alhaji Koki and others — we know that scraps were washed and reused and that gifts of paper were prized.<sup>33</sup> But even so, the interval between the year a sheet of paper was produced and the year it was used could vary enormously. It also appears to be the case that the papermakers engaged in export used the same mould design for many decades as this would have minimized their costs.

Northern Nigerian manuscript copyists rarely added the date of the copy but instead copied the original, including the original date if there was one, but analysis of watermarks, countermarks and paper characteristics can help in determining if a document was actually written by Uthman dan Fodio or is a fair copy. It can provide more precise means for dating a document than that recorded in a colophon but analysis can be more complex in the frequent occurrence of a single manuscript containing paper that was produced over several centuries.<sup>34</sup>

## 5 Watermark studies

Several collections of watermark tracings and photographs have been published that traditionally have been used in the study of watermarks in sub-Saharan manuscripts. The major ones are: Nikolaev 1954: *Watermarks of the medieval Ottoman documents in Bulgarian libraries*; Eineder 1960: *Ancient Paper-Mills of the Former Austro-Hungarian Empire*; Heawood 1960: *Watermarks mainly of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries*; Ersoy 1963: *XVIII. Ve XIX. Yuzyillarda Turkiye'de Kagit*; Fedrigoni 1966: *L'industria Veneta della carta*; Velkov/Andreev 1983: *Trois croissants*; Velkov 2005: *Divers types d'images*; Andreev 2007: *Les Filigranes dans les Documents Ottomans: Couronne*; Regourd 2008: *Manuscrits de Zabid*.

Others are listed in the bibliography of this paper. Eineder, Heawood, Fedrigoni and Nikolaev ignore paper characteristics and all of these authors use the tracing methods of recording watermarks with attendant omissions and inaccuracies. Much of Eineder's text regarding the Galvani has been contradicted by recent archival research.<sup>35</sup> Eineder and Heawood rely exclusively on European

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<sup>33</sup> Denham/Clapperton/Oudney 1826; Denham's narrative 208,329, Clapperton's narrative 53; Barth 1857 I, 519, II, 155; Nachtigal 1881 II, 227, 230, 232, 382–383; Skinner 1977, 33–34

<sup>34</sup> Biddle forthcoming b.

<sup>35</sup> Mattozzi 1994, 1996, 2001; Ganzer 1994; Crippa/Mattozzi 1999.

sources – printed books, governmental and commercial transactions – but the paper we find in sub-Saharan manuscripts was primarily produced for the ‘Oriente’ export market and therefore is rarely included. Fedrigoni records only thirty-eight watermarks and, along with Nikolaev, does not record laid or chain line placement; however, Fedrigoni’s text is a dense mine of information with the exception of the Ceneda/Serravalle papermakers. This is understandable as Ceneda/Serravalle was at the heart of the decisive 1918 Battle of Vittorio Veneto. The bombing was intense and much of the archival and archaeological record was obliterated, a great loss, given the fact that Briquet (1968) recorded Serravalle paper makers as responsible for the earliest proto *tre lune* – Briquet 3256 dated 1543.

Ersoy’s tracings are wildly imprecise and laid lines are only occasionally included. The Velkov/Andreev volumes are useful, using photographs rather than tracings. The photographs are small but usually one is able to ascertain laid and chain line placement as well as some paper characteristics but the volumes terminate with documents dated earlier than 1799. The Ersoy and Velkov/Andreev volumes rely on documents from chanceries where the paper was of a mandated high quality, unlike much of the paper sent across the Sahara. Regourd’s work is well done and has proven to be useful. In addition to these sources we can also find out much from a proper examination of the components present in the paper and the proportion of those components. For instance nineteenth to early twentieth century papers from the north of Venice, which includes those marked ‘Andrea Galvani Pordenone’, have a far greater proportion of cotton than linen and sometimes include traces of silk, not surprising when we find that the main activity that characterized nineteenth and early twentieth century industrial production in Pordenone was the cotton, and to a lesser extent, the silk industry.<sup>36</sup> We find little use of wood pulp in Italy until papermakers began to use machines, which due to their increased capacity required massive amounts of material that could not be met by the already insufficient rag supply.<sup>37</sup>

## 6 Galvani watermarks

The Galvani paper mills provide a useful case study as to how we can deduce date ranges for their watermarks by using a holistic approach – combining paper

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<sup>36</sup> Populin 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Morpurgo 1874; Sartori 1897; *Ministero di Agricoltura* 1898; Mattozzi 2001, 104.

sheet analysis with the information to be found in watermark directories, regional, town, family, mill or paper-sector economic history and archaeology, works that flesh out the activities of Italian papermakers.

The Galvani family is documented as being in the papermaking business from the 1730s. They had paper depots in Udine, north of Venice, and later in Trieste. They also opened a ceramics factory in 1811 that lasted until 1969 and they also operated cotton and silk mills. Their ceramics were widely exported. A close relative of mine, born in the 1890s on a cattle ranch in Roswell, New Mexico, owned a Galvani plate she inherited from her mother. One of the Galvani, Andrea IV (1797–1855) who first used the ‘Andrea Galvani Pordenone’ script countermark, was a formidable scientist and inventor as well as an entrepreneur, running the family paper, ceramic, cotton and silk mills. For more than two centuries Galvani was a small family-owned company that generated the bulk of its sales abroad to the ‘Oriente’, North and South America and even Malaysia. They dominated a narrow but lucrative market in Italian exports.

The Galvani had five paper mills: Viazzol in Cordenons — rented c.1730, purchased prior to 1796, sold 1984; San Valentino in Pordenone — 1770–1860; Bel-lasio in Cordenons — c.1803–1897; Porcia nella Villa di Rorai Piccolo, adjacent to Pordenone — 1804–1929; Rizzardi in Ceneda (now Vittorio Veneto) — c.1838–1895. Whilst Eineder stated there was a Galvani mill in Codroipo<sup>38</sup> it was not a paper mill. Porcia Rorai is separated from Pordenone by a ditch and Pordenone melds into Cordenons. Ceneda melds into Serravalle (both now called Vittorio Veneto) and by road is about 43 km (26 miles) to the northwest of Pordenone. The only Galvani mills that produced machine-made paper were Viazzol and Porcia Rorai.

Andrea II (1668–1758) operated Viazzol 1734–1758. He exported to the Levant and there are reports of Arabs and Turks frequently coming to Pordenone to demand his products.<sup>39</sup> His grandsons, Valentino III (1723–1797) and Andrea III (1722–1809), inherited directly from him but they divided the property in 1764 when the paper making operations were turned over to Valentino III, while activities relating to land became the purview of Andrea III. Valentino III continued to rent Viazzol and purchased San Valentino in 1770. In 1796 Valentino III’s sons, Antonio, Giuseppe and Carlo, officially took over the paper mills and the company became ‘fratelli Galvani’ or ‘Antonio e fratelli’. They acquired Porcia Rorai after a lengthy legal battle in 1804.

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<sup>38</sup> Eineder 1960, 169.

<sup>39</sup> Benedetti 1964, 370–371.

In 1803 Andrea III purchased Bellasio on his own and restored it. Andrea III ceded his interest in this paper mill to Antonio (1767–1823?) and Carlo (1775–1837) before he died in 1809. In 1818 the four mills (Viazzol, San Valentino, Porcia Rorai and Bellasio) were registered as ‘Galvani e fratelli fu Valentino’. When Antonio went blind he sold out to Carlo and in 1823 the company became ‘Carlo Galvani già Valentino’. In 1826 when Andrea IV, Andrea III’s grandson, married Carlo’s only child, Catterina, the two branches of the family were reunited. The mark ‘Andrea Galvani’ was also registered the same year. By 1836 the scientist and inventor Andrea IV had assumed directorship of the firm and began to institute modern manufacturing methods. Antonio and Giuseppe predeceased Carlo, who died in 1837. Andrea IV was the sole heir and now had the four paper mills, in addition to other factories — ceramics, silk, etc. — that he inherited from other family members. Around 1838 he acquired the fifth paper mill, Rizzardi in Ceneda.

Until Andrea IV’s death in 1855 the Galvani regularly won medals for the quality of their paper and for numerous paper-making innovations. But by 1868 it was sadly noted that they were faithful to the ‘ancient methods, perhaps because of the strong marketing in the Levant where even the poorest and bad paper manufactured has advantageous outlet’.<sup>40</sup> The succeeding generations of the Galvani family continued to use the name ‘Andrea Galvani’ as the name of the paper making firm from the time it was first registered in 1826 until the 1960’s. They sold out in 1984 to the Gilberti family, who continue to operate the Viazzol mill as Gruppo Cordenons. The Gilberti also continued to use the ‘Andrea Galvani’ mark until 2008 when one could still buy filter paper with a *carta da filtra* watermark first introduced in 1881.<sup>41</sup> From northern Nigerian examples we find that by the nineteenth century Galvani paper is characterized by a rigid layout initially with countermarks, and then watermarks, centred between the chain lines. For more than a century their *tre lune* watermark was made-up of three small crescents, gradually diminishing in size and centred between the chain lines. Watermarks are centred on the left of the mould and the open crescents face right. The countermark is centred on the right half of the mould. Watermarks and countermarks are at the central horizontal line. This means that in northern Nigerian manuscripts the watermark and the countermark are found cut in half since single sheets, 480 × 340 mm, were cut into four pieces. This results in the common 240 × 170 mm sheet size found in northern Nigerian collections. The Galvani used hollow Roman capital letters for the two-letter countermark from 1773

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<sup>40</sup> Ganzer 1994, 37 my translation.

<sup>41</sup> *Bibliografia Italiana* 1881, 37.

to the late 1880s. Their mould makers used wooden molds to shape the single wires used to make up watermarks and countermarks resulting in little variation.

Valentino III installed the first Holland beater in the Veneto c.1770, a century after its invention, a contributing factor in the good formation of their hand-made papers, even those not of the first quality. Their paper sheets become cloudy when they began using the cylinder/*tamburo* machines in the late 1880s. Using this information, found in Italian and paper-sector sources<sup>42</sup>, coupled with published watermark studies and field discoveries, we can deduce the following:

## 7 VG countermark

The VG countermark was used by the Galvani mills c.1760s–c.1839. The Galvani VG is listed as terminated in the first catalogue of countermarks issued by the *fabbricanti della carta* published in 1768.<sup>43</sup> This implies that it had been used previously but all recorded examples are later than 1768. The VG countermark is documented in Eineder, the earliest, VG 319 dated 1769, the latest 368 dated 1837; Nikolaev earliest VG 577 dated 1773, latest 1075 dated 1839; Ersoy earliest VG 209 dated 1774–5, latest 155 dated 1836–7.

### 7.1 VG plus watermark of an ornate crowned crest with moon face facing right and *TRE LUNE* spelled out in hollow capital letters

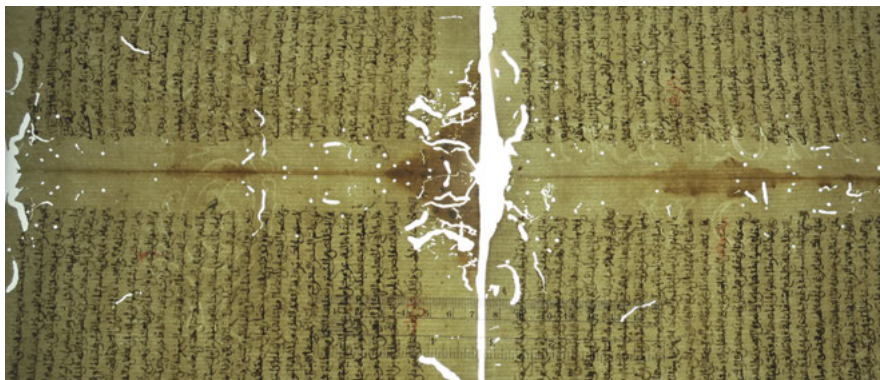
This watermark is found in Nikolaev 598, dated 1779. Velkov<sup>44</sup> uses the same source. This is an early occurrence of the hollow Roman VG. Velkov illustrates several examples of this watermark (184–199), all with slight mould variations, with the latest dated 1799. Eineder 424 dated 1793 shows the ornate crowned crest with moon face and VG. The Velkov and Eineder examples do not have the *TRE LUNE* spelled out. Paden 9 is a complete example in a Nigerian collection, purchased in the 1960s by John Paden in the Kano market.

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<sup>42</sup> *Annuario della Libreria* 1884, 376; *Ministero di Agricoltura* 1898, 53; Fedrigoni 1966, 241; Tranchini 1991, 36–37; Ganzer 1994, Mattozzi 1994, 1996 and 2001; Crippa/Mattozzi 1999, 80–82, 101–105; Rosa 2004; Antonioli et al 2006, 4; Carniel et al 2008, 30, 59–60; Zakaria/DeGuise/Abdul Latif 2008; Populin 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Mattozzi 1996, 338.

<sup>44</sup> Velkov 2005, 178–179.



**Fig. 12:** VG plus watermark of ornate crowned crest with moon face facing right and *tre lune* spelled out. This paper is very white and smooth. (Paden 9).

### **VG plus ornate crowned crest and *tre lune* (Fig. 12)**

Date:	c.1779–1799
Type:	Laid hand-made
Watermark dimension:	50 × 135 mm
Fiber:	Cotton and linen
Laid lines:	6 per cm
Chains lines:	29 mm
Bulk/thickness:	.18–.2 mm

## **7.2 VG with watermark of *tre lune* (three moons)**

Eineder records no VG *tre lune* (three moons) watermarks. Nikolaev 616 is dated 1779 and has *Tre Lune* spelled out under the three moons (as in Andreev and Velkov 812 dated 1779). Ersoy 164 dated 1779 also records this watermark with *Tre Lune* spelled out. In addition, Ersoy 209 records a crowned VG with *tre lune* dated 1774–5. This watermark, but without *Tre Lune* under the crescents or a crown above the VG, was used by Major Dixon Denham in his 1822–1824 expedition journals (recorded as Heawood 880), currently held by the National Archives (Public Record Office) in London. During the same expedition Captain Hugh Clapperton also used paper that was similarly marked (from two different moulds) for two maps of the area around ‘Lake Tchad’. The paper in these maps is extremely floccular, heavily sized, with shadow lines along the chain lines and is .18–.21mm

thick.<sup>45</sup> This simple Denham-Clapperton type was also found in a northern Nigerian manuscript, NAK B/AR4–3 dated 1839, with the same watermark and countermark but on a very different paper that used by Clapperton.



**Fig. 13:** VG with plain *tre lune* watermark. There are no shadows along the chain lines (NAK B/AR4-3 dated 1839).

#### VG with plain *tre lune* watermark (Fig. 13)

Date:	c.1823–1839
Type:	Laid hand-made
Watermark dimension:	75 × 25 mm
Fiber:	Cotton and linen
Laid lines:	6 per cm
Chains lines:	29–31 mm
Bulk/thickness:	.13–.15 mm

### 7.3 VG with watermark of moon face in simple crest – *carta reale*

In Nikolaev 959 dated 1810 and without the VG countermark Nikolaev 1005 (1821), 1038 (1829) and 1075 (1839). This paper was found in an undated northern Nigerian manuscript, Falke 1326 and in NAK B/AR4–2 dated 1834, both of which had extremely good sheet formation and were thick (.19–.21 mm and .20–.23 mm respectively).

<sup>45</sup> Clapperton Papers MS 171/5/3–4. The Brenthurst Library, Johannesburg, South Africa.



**Fig.14:** VG with watermark of moon face in simple crest. (Falke 1326).

**VG with moon face in simple crest (Fig. 14)**

Date:	1810–1839
Type:	Laid hand-made
Watermark dimension:	52 × 77 mm
Fiber:	Cotton and linen
Laid lines:	7 per cm
Chain lines:	31 mm
Bulk/thickness:	.19–.21 mm-VG with three curly moon faces

**7.4 VG with three curly moon faces**

This watermark is found in Wiesmüller — Refaiya Vollers 622 dated 1836<sup>46</sup>; in Ersoy 155 dated 1836–37 and in northern Nigerian manuscripts NAK B/AR4/3 dated 1839 and undated Falke 1304, 1326.

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<sup>46</sup> Wiesmüller n.d.





Fig. 15: VG with three curly moon faces. (NAK B/AR4/3 dated 1839 — two moulds).

#### VG with three curly moon faces (Fig. 15)

Date:	1834–1839
Type:	laid hand-made
Watermark dimension:	60 × 30mm
Fiber:	Cotton and linen
Laid lines:	6 per cm
Chain lines:	29–31 mm
Bulk/thickness:	.13–.15 mm

## 8 AG countermark

Whilst it is possible that the AG countermark was used by Andrea III during the two periods he was involved in papermaking, 1756–64 and 1803–8, there is no archival record to support this. ‘Andrea Galvani’ was registered as a mark in

1826.<sup>47</sup> Andrea IV assumed direction of the family business in 1836<sup>48</sup> and archival evidence strongly suggests he adopted the AG countermark the same year. It was during his tenure that modern industrial practices come to the fore with, amongst other innovations, mould standardization. AG is used until the late nineteenth century when the remaining two mills – Viazzol and Porcia Rorai – added *al tamburo* machines.

## 8.1 AG with *tre lune*

Amongst the examples found in northern Nigerian collections: MAF 1, 128, and 183 with no dates; Jos 345 dated 1872; and CTSS 86/0006 dated 1796 and CTSS 86/0029 dated 1795. Archival evidence suggests that neither of these CTSS dates are valid.<sup>49</sup> Other examples are Regourd 2008 76–77 dated 1866; 78–80 dated 1822 – another improbable date; and 159–162 dated 1866 (with a somewhat script-like AG). In all Nigerian sheets the A and G are centered between the chain lines, the points of the crescents touch the chain lines, and the sheets are speckled with short dark fibers and flocs.

### AG with *tre lune* (Fig. 16)

Date:	1836–late 1880's
Type:	Laid hand-made
Watermark dimensions:	95 × 32 mm
Fiber:	Unknown, many dark inclusions and flocs
Laid lines:	7 per cm
Chain lines:	32 mm
Bulk/thickness:	.11–.13

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<sup>47</sup> Mattozzi 1994, 20.

<sup>48</sup> Rosa 2004, 9.

<sup>49</sup> Mattozzi 1996, 323–4; 2001, 162.



Fig. 16: AG with *tre lune*. (MAF 1 undated).

## 8.2 AG with *tre lune* and ‘Andrea Galvani Pordenone’ in script

Examples found in Nigerian collections include undated MAF 21, B/AR2-2 dated 1847 and B/AR6-5 dated 1882. This is the first appearance of ‘Andrea Galvani Pordenone’ spelled out in script, as a countermark, coupled with the AG and *tre lune* watermark. During the early 1840s Andrea IV had developed numerous improvements speeding up paper-making production. In 1846 he was awarded a 5-year patent, or *privilegio*, for three of these inventions, one of which was for substituting plant matter for rags. MAF 21 was found with intact *bifolium* allowing a confident reconstruction of the mould layout. The three crescents were centred on the right and the AG centred on the left of the mould. The placement of the script countermark, hugging the lower right edge of the mould under the AG, suggests that he added his name in script to existing moulds, perhaps in celebration of his numerous awards and achievements coupled with ten years of directing the mills’ activities and twenty years since ‘Andrea Galvani’ was registered as a mark.

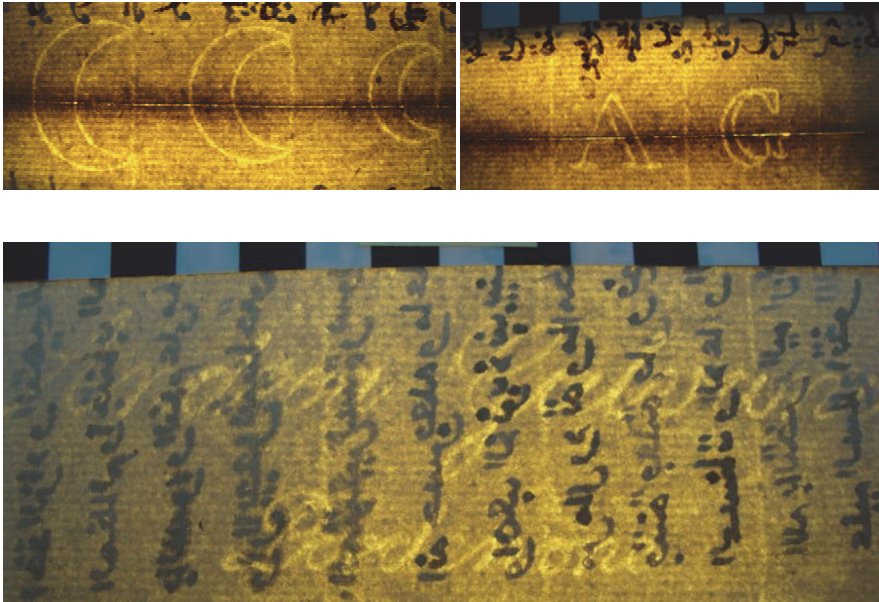


Fig. 17: AG with *tre lune* and ‘Andrea Galvani Pordenone’ in script under the AG. (MAF 21).

**AG with *tre lune* and ‘Andrea Galvani Pordenone’ in script (Fig. 17)**

Date:	1846–late 1880’s
Type:	Laid hand-made
Watermark dimensions:	95 × 32 mm
Fiber:	Cotton, linen, silica
Laid:	7 per cm
Chains:	32 mm
Bulk/thickness:	.11–.12 mm

After examining scores of sheets with three graduated crescents and the points of the crescents touching the chain lines, 7 laid lines per cm, and chain lines 32 mm apart, even without finding the AG countermark, I am confident that all these sheets are from the Galvani mills.

### 8.3 AG with moon face in simple crest and ‘Andrea Galvani Pordenone’ in script

The James McBey Collection of watermarked paper <sup>50</sup> was created by McBey as a by-product of his work as an engraver and etcher during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It was issued in a limited collection by Harvard University and is comprised of fifty-seven fully catalogued unprinted sheets. The Galvani sheet, #37, was purchased by McBey in Cairo in 1917. It is of high quality, fairly thick, white, well, though not superbly, made paper that does not appear to have been used. In quality it looks as if it were earlier made than 1917 but even today, in 2014, many mills continue to make hand-made paper for special projects and they admit to using old moulds. The sheet size is 480 × 340 mm. When overlaying the AG and ‘Andrea Galvani Pordenone’ layout in this sheet and the one from MAF 21, there was no difference between this mould and the one used in 1847, an example of Galvani standardization. Nigerian manuscripts CTSS 86/0029 and Falke 1028 are other examples. Regourd 2008 records 36–41 undated and 73–75 dated 1875.



**Fig. 18:** McBey #37 c. 1917. The crest and the AG are at the horizontal centre line of the sheet.

<sup>50</sup> Barker 1981.

**AG with moon face in simple crest and ‘Andrea Galvani Pordenone’ – *carta reale* (Fig. 18)**

Date:	1846 – early twentieth century
Type:	Laid hand-made
Watermark dimensions:	52 × 77 mm
Fiber:	Cotton and linen
Laid lines:	7 per cm
Chain lines:	31 mm
Bulk/thickness:	.18 mm
Sheet size:	480 × 340 mm

## 9 Galvani countermarks and watermarks in the machine era

In 1889 the Porcia Rorai mill was modernized with the installation of a hydraulic turbine generating electricity. In 1895 the Rizzardi Ceneda mill closed and the building remained unused for a century. In 1898 *Annali di Statistica Industriale* reported that a cylinder or al tamburo machine was operating in Pordenone and Cardenons. The Cordenons mill would have been the Galvani Viazoll mill. The Pordenone mill would have belonged to Carlo Lustig of Trieste who took over the ancient Trevisan mill, Cartiera Noncello, in 1890.<sup>51</sup>

*Phillips’ Paper Trade Directory of the World* resumed publication in 1906/7 after a thirteen-year gap. They record that in 1906/07 Galvani reported twelve vats but ‘two machines 135 cm’. By 1913/14 they record that their annual output had decreased by a third from 624 tons to 400, from twelve vats to two but still had ‘two machines 135 cm’. Circa 1912 they acquired an English agent, Slade-Jones of London, and advertised as a source of ‘Antique papers and papers for export to the Levant’.<sup>52</sup> Between 1906/07 and 1946/7, with every issue of Phillips’ Paper Trade published, Galvani continued to report ‘two machines 135 cm’ and an annual production of 400 tons even though they closed the Porcia Rorai mill in 1929 and sold it in 1932.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Ministero di Agricoltura* 1898, 53; Mattozzi 2001, 103; Populin 2009, 26.

<sup>52</sup> Phillips 1907, 486; 1914, 536.

<sup>53</sup> In *Phillips’ Paper Trade Directory of the World* (1884, 1905-1946), Galvani is listed in each volume under the entry for Italy.

Because there were two Galvani mills until 1929 and each mill could have had its own set of dandy rolls producing hundreds of thousands of marked sheets, it is difficult to date these machine-made marks. However, close examination of the sheets allows an archaeological typological sequence – types I have tagged for ease of reference as AGmm1 to AGmm7 – with the caveat that each type could have been produced concurrently with another type and in particular AGmm4–7. There is the slight possibility that the last four types were made on continuous machines or, more probably, with cylinder *al tamburo* machines operating at high speeds, resulting in pulp hugging one side of the laid lines.

## 9.1 AGmm1

Amongst Nigerian examples are Jos 50 and Falke 34, both undated. Initially the Galvani ran their cylinder *al tamburo* machines at a low speed, resulting in a paper with no discernible grain, and continued to use their usual pulp mixture of cotton and other rags. Their first machine-made paper c. 1890s is watermarked A. Galvani Pordenone in hollow san-serif letters with all letters connected by wire. The letter attachment to the dandy roll is uneven and one can see tie-downs. Some of the wires cut through the paper sheet. Paper fibers are cotton and linen; formation is very cloudy. No watermark found.

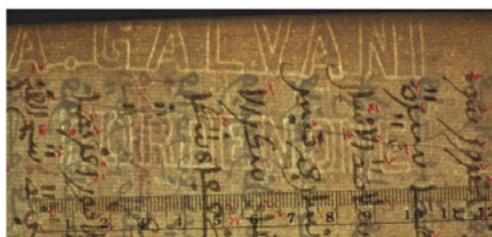


Fig. 19: AGmm1 c. 1890. (Falke 34 undated).

## 9.2 AGmm2

A. Galvani Pordenone in hollow sans-serif letters, each letter separate, c.1890s. In a second phase of machine-made production they are still using the same watermark but with letters individually soldered to the dandy roll's wire cylinder. Again some of the wires cut through the paper sheet. Paper fibers are cotton and linen and formation is still very cloudy. No watermark found.



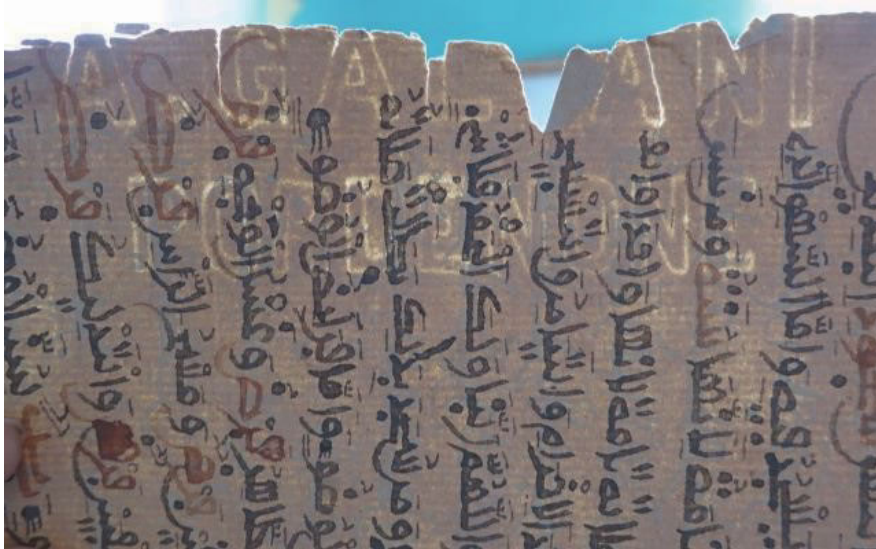


Fig. 20: AGmm2. (NAK B/AR5/6 dated 1913).

### 9.3 AGmm3

In a third iteration Andrea is spelled out but with no space between the names – Andreagalvani – with Pordenone underneath – in hollow sans-serif letters solidly soldered to the roll face plus fat *tre lune*. Amongst many examples in Nigerian manuscripts are Falke 2108 and MAF 19, both undated. Nikolaev 1195 is dated 1903. MAF 19 has sheets showing that this version was used until the dandy roll began to shred. The last image shows the impression where the wire is stitched together around the cylinder. Fibers cotton, linen and miniscule traces of silk. Paper formation is sometimes cloudy, the *tre lune* are often blurry. The machine was running at a very low speed as the fibers do not consistently hug one side of the laid lines. The sheets exhibit little grain.





Fig. 21: AGmm3 c.1903. (MAF 19 undated).

## 9.4 AGmm4

Andrea Galvani Pordenone in curly script with fat *tre lune*. This is a very common paper in Nigerian manuscripts with every northern Nigerian collection examined having examples – MAF 20, Falke 27, CTSS 86/0039, etc. Fibers are cotton, linen and mechanical ground wood. The ‘A’ in Andrea is pointy at the top and whilst there is space between Andrea and the Galvani a single wire usually connects the lower-case ‘a’ and the upper-case ‘G’ but its *tre lune* are a distinguishing characteristic. The points of the *tre lune* touch the chain lines just as they did in the hand-made era and these marks are oftentimes blurry and the paper cloudy. The mills appear to have been struggling with the new technology or with a new pulp combination that contains ground wood. With the continuous machine the pulp was sprayed onto the wire mesh, a very different and a very challenging pulp application method when compared to centuries of experience with dipping a mould into a vat.

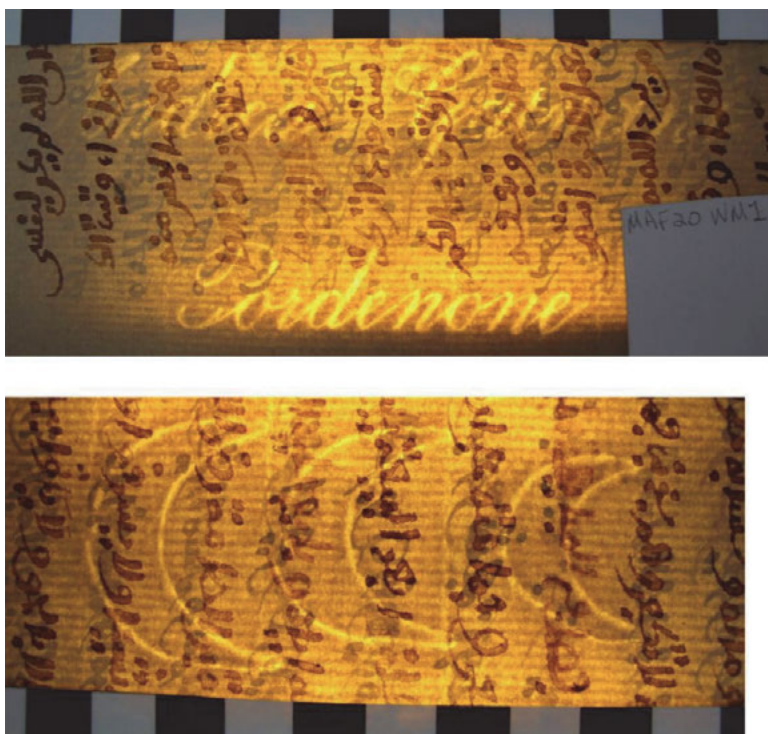


Fig. 22: AGmm4 c. 1905. (MAF 20 undated).

## 9.5 AGmm5

Andrea Galvani Pordenone in curly script and very slender *tre lune*. Dated examples include NAK B/AR5/5 dated 1913 and Jos 568 dated 1928. Usually the sheets have a closed, even formation. Fibers cotton, mechanical ground wood and assorted vegetable. AGmm5 is very common in northern Nigerian manuscripts and is frequently found together with ‘SSB’ *tre lune* paper from the Cartiera Italiana Serravalle-Sesia-Borgo mill.

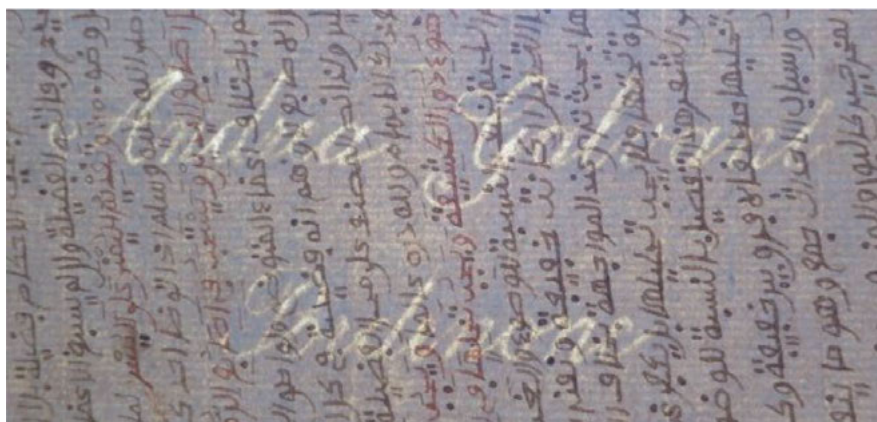


Fig. 23: AGmm5 c.1913–28. (NAK B/AR5-5 dated 1913).

As dandy rolls wore out they would be replaced. There are minor differences but the format is essentially the same. This example (Fig. 24) is from MAF 270 undated but the manuscript included paper from Cartiere Prealpine Intra (Italia), active 1929–1983.

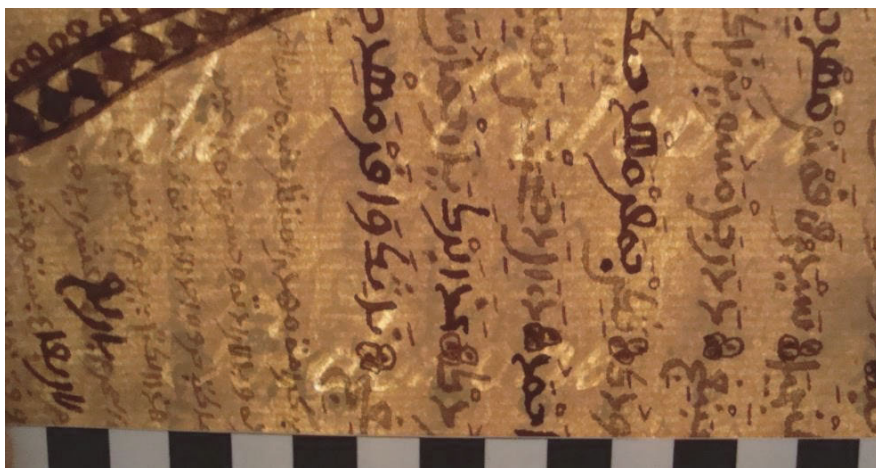


Fig. 24: AGmm5 (MAF 270 undated).

## 9.6 AGmm6

Andrea Galvani Pordenone in curly script with moon face in simple crest. The Galvani continued to produce the two varieties – *tre lune* and *carta reale*. This Nigerian example dated 1924 is in a private collection, its formation is variable and the fibers are cotton, wood and miniscule coloured fibres. Another example is Regourd 2008 13–14 dated 1918.





Fig. 25: AGmm6 in a *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* dated 1924. (Private collection).

## 9.7 AGmm7

Regourd recently published a previously unknown machine-made variant.<sup>54</sup> It is atypical in that the crest with moon face facing right has only one rim but the script signature of ‘Andrea Galvani Pordenone’ is similar to AGmm4 in that a single wire appears to connect the lower-case ‘a’ and the upper-case ‘G’. These Galvani machine-made papers were watermarked with dandy rolls so there is no reason why differently marked papers could not have been produced concurrently as there were two mills — Porcia Rorai in Pordenone and Viazzol in Cardenons — both in production between the late 1880’s and up to 1929. And by 1906/07 each mill could have had its own machine and each would have had its own set of dandy rolls. This is another example of why we should routinely expect date ranges for the same watermarks in machine-made paper rather than precise dates.

## 10 Conclusion

As we can see, watermarks together with their countermarks, whether in hand-made or machine-made paper, can be useful for dating and authenticating but all the more so when studied holistically, that is within the context of what the sheets themselves tell, and with reference to the historical and archaeological record. We should record not only watermarks and countermarks, but also their precise placement, the details of the sheets in which they appear, and whenever possible obtain paper samples in order to conduct microscopic and chemical analysis. It takes a great deal of paper data to create reliable information sources and we are now only in the early stages of that collection process. When combined with mill and paper economic and with technological history and archaeology, this knowledge will allow us to make a more accurate use of the marks we find in paper.

As there will only ever be a few cases in which ‘identical’ watermarks can be compared to those in securely dated manuscripts, we should be prepared to say we have fuzzy dates or a date range when using watermarks to date sub-Saharan manuscripts in Arabic script.

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<sup>54</sup> Regourd 2015.

## Abbreviations

CTSS – Center for Trans-Saharan Studies, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria

Falke — Umar Falke Collection, Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, USA

Jos — Arabic Manuscript Collection, Jos Museum, National Commission of Museums and Monuments, Jos, Nigeria

MAF — Modibbo Ahmadu Fufore Collection, Arewa House, Ahmadu Bello University, Kaduna, Nigeria

NAK — National Archives Kaduna, Nigeria

Paden — John Paden Collection, Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, USA

PLM — Polarized light microscopy was carried out by the author under the tutelage of Dr. Gary Laughlin of McCrone Research Associates.

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Andrea Brigaglia

# *Fī Lawḥin Maḥfūz*: Towards a Phenomenological Analysis of the Quranic Tablet

Yonder heart by tracery of earth unscored,  
Cometh keeper of the mysteries to be  
Mirror-holder to the Tablet the preserved  
Double grows it of the script from doubt that free.<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This article looks at the *lawḥ* (wooden tablet) in traditional Quranic education in Africa, through the lens of the phenomenology of religion. It argues that, the set of pedagogical practices that are sustained with the support of the *lawḥ* can be understood as a complex ritual of initiation into Islamic notions and beliefs. As in Eliade's classical phenomenology, this ritual takes the form of a symbolic re-enactment of a primordial myth and acts as the support of a symbolic identification between the initiate and a sacred ancestor. A symbol, at the same time, of the archetypal Quran (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz*), of the metaphysical reality of the Prophet (*al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya*), and of the pupil's human form, the *lawḥ* allows for the symbolic identification of the protagonist of the initiation (the pupil) with the protagonist (the Prophet) of Islam's most primordial myth (the revelation of the Quran).

## 1 Introduction

Due to the limited availability of paper before the development of the modern paper industry, the wooden tablet (in Arabic, *lawḥ*) was used for centuries as the principal support for the practice of literacy in Africa—just as anywhere else in the Muslim world. So ubiquitous was the *lawḥ* in African Muslim cultures, that in many instances, it also became the main symbol of Islamic literacy and Quranic scholarship. Still to this day in northern Nigeria, the stylized image of a *lawḥ* can be seen, used as a decorative pattern on the walls of a house, probably belonging

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<sup>1</sup> From a Turkish poem by Emir Adil quoted and translated in Gibb 1900, vol. 1, 423. This essay is dedicated to Iliya, Na-Yaya and Nura of Sabuwar Kofa (Kano), as well as to the memory of the late Garba Mai Tebur. I wish to express my thanks to Louis Brenner for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper, and to Francesco Zappa for the many conversations that contributed to the development of my central idea.



**Fig. 1:** Decorated walls of a house (probably belonging to a Quranic teacher) in Zaria, 2008.  
© Andrea Brigaglia.

to a scholar, in Zaria (Fig. 1) and as a tombstone signaling the resting place of Quranic teachers in the cemetery of Kano (Fig. 2). In Maiduguri, a modern monument in the form of three *lawh*-s can be seen in a public square, probably as a homage to the fame of the city as the ‘capital’ of traditional Quranic learning in Nigeria. It is entirely normal for objects in common use in a society to become a symbol of the category of people they are associated with, like a shovel for a baker, a sickle for a farmer, a hammer for a factory worker, a rolling pin for a housewife. This process is so obvious that its explanation does not need any particular anthropological insight. Religious symbols, however, require a different set of premises to be understood. In fact, the exceptional appeal of religiously charged images and objects should be understood not only as an immediate consequence of their wide use by a specific social group (clerical or otherwise), but also in relation to the broader net of sacred ideas and notions (myths) to which they are connected in the context of a specific religious system. In other words, when we look at religiously charged objects, we have to keep in mind that they are already a symbol of something, *before* becoming practical objects of common use, rather than vice versa.



**Fig. 2:** Iron gravestone in the shape of a Quranic tablet in the Goron Dutse cemetery of Kano.  
© Auwalu Hassan and Sani Yakubu Adam.

Building on some theoretical insights developed by the recent anthropology of Islamic education in West Africa, as well as on some ideas drawn from Mircea Eliade's classical works on myth and ritual, this essay will argue that in traditional northern Nigerian Muslim societies, the *lawḥ* was not only an indispensable practical tool for the transmission of Quranic knowledge, but also the central piece of a complex set of symbols that used to support an educational and initiatory process based on the ritual re-enactment of the myth of the Quranic revelation.

## 2 Embodied epistemology

Published in 2001, Louis Brenner's monograph *Controlling Knowledge* remains one of the most comprehensive and theoretically inspiring studies on religion

and education in a West African Muslim society. Reconstructing the history of the several experiments of reform and counter-reform of Islamic education attempted in Mali during the colonial and post-colonial periods, Brenner argues that a fundamental shift was produced by the epochal rupture of colonization and modernization. This was not so much an ideological divide between religious and secular education, but rather between the 'esoteric episteme' conveyed by the traditional Quranic school system on the one hand, and the 'rational episteme' promoted by new actors represented by both State secular schools and private Islamic schools on the other. For Brenner, the difference between the two categories was less about the content of the notions imparted than about their conceptions of knowledge. The old Quranic school system was aimed at transforming the pupil's inner and social persona through a process that had an essentially 'initiatric nature.'<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the modern Islamic schools, just like the secular ones, reconfigured (Islamic) knowledge as a formal, disembodied set of notions that was to be conveyed to the pupil in an objectified, quantifiable fashion. In the modern schools, the personal relationship between the pupils and their teacher became looser, and the esoteric and initiatic dimension which constituted an integral part of traditional Quranic learning was lost or at least, diluted. The disappearance of the numerous esoteric notions and practices traditionally associated with Quranic learning (ritually 'drinking' the ink used to write the Quran; manufacturing talismans based on Quranic verses, etc.) is probably one of the most apparent signs of what Brenner calls the 'rationalization' of knowledge mediated by the modern Islamic school.<sup>3</sup>

In her studies on traditional Quranic education in Mauritania, Corinne Fortier has added another dimension to the anthropology of Islamic education in West Africa, highlighting the role played by the sensory and corporal dimension in the pedagogical practices of West African Muslim communities. Through the impact of sound and corporal pain, the Quranic schools studied by Fortier are

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<sup>2</sup> Brenner 2001, 7.

<sup>3</sup> The best attempt to look at the practices of Quranic talisman-making as an integral part of the epistemology of the Quranic school and of the worldview transmitted by the traditional scholars, is probably Mommersteeg 2001. A study based on the opposite theoretical assumption is El-Tom 1985, where the practices of 'drinking the Qur'an' (i.e. writing selected verses on a wooden slate and drinking the water that has been used to wash the ink off the slate) for healing or apotropaic purposes, are interpreted as a sign of the resistance of the 'local' substratum of the Berti people of Sudan, threatened by a supposedly intrinsically puritanical 'Arab' Islam. The main problem with the latter argument is that such supposedly 'Berti' practices have been attested, virtually identical, across most of the Muslim world—among Berti, Yoruba and Hausas just as much as among Arabs, Persians and Turks.

meant to inscribe Islam in the bodies of the pupils and to shape an embodied Muslim subjectivity.<sup>4</sup> The idea that the educational practices of traditional Muslim West Africa must be read essentially as techniques of embodiment has recently been taken up and developed into full-fledged analyses in the studies of Rudolph Ware and Zachary Wright, who use the related terms of (respectively) ‘embodied knowledge’ and ‘living knowledge’ as theoretical tools to unpack the logic of traditional religious education in Islam, in particular (but not exclusively) in the West African context. Related, but not identical to, Brenner’s ‘esoteric episteme’, embodied knowledge involves ‘initiatory personal transmission, and knowledge beyond texts or words which came to possess (and thus be manifested by) the being of the practitioners’.<sup>5</sup> Ware and Wright’s two monographs, titled respectively *The Walking Qur’an*<sup>6</sup> and *Living Knowledge in West African Islam*,<sup>7</sup> provide two compelling attempts to look at traditional Islamic pedagogy in Africa—both in its elementary level (the Quranic school, main object of Ware’s study) and in its higher one (the legal, theological and Sufi training addressed by Wright’s work)—as epistemologies of embodiment.

In the following couplets, the contemporary Nigerian Muslim scholar Muḥammad Kani Gusau, points to a similar conceptual opposition between the disembodied, abstract religious knowledge of modern education and the ‘embodied Islam’ transmitted as ‘living knowledge’ in the vestibules (*dahāliz*) of the traditional scholars. While the first transmits a superficial (albeit extensive) and purely mental understanding, the second induces the intimate transformation of the pupil’s subjectivity. As a close student of the famous scholar Shaykh ‘Uthmān Mai Hula (d. 1988), but at the same time a graduate of Bayero University Kano, the author is himself a product of both systems and is well aware of the attack that the traditional system is undergoing in contemporary Muslim Africa—an attack to which these verses can be seen as a sort of response.

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<sup>4</sup> Fortier 1998 and 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Wright 2010, 33.

<sup>6</sup> Ware 2014. See also Boyle 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Wright 2015.

إذ اللا نظامي حاز تقوى وطاعةً	♠	يفوق النظمي اللا أباالي بمخلص
فيا ويح من يسعى لإفساد ما بنا	♠	دهاليز أهل التقى والتخصّص
لقد كان للإسلام مأوا وملجأ	♠	بها في قديم مع حديث كمخلص
[...]		
فما الأوليا والاتقيا وذؤو الهدى	♠	سوى من تلامذة الدهليز خُص
هنالك فرق بين من هو عالم	♠	ومن هو علماني لأجل التخصّص
فعلّم يُورث طاعة الله فائق	♠	مُجرّد علم فيه حبّ التشخص
فهذا بيان ليس دما لغيرها	♠	ولا كنه توطيد ركن مننص
ولم لا وإني زرتها ودرّيتها	♠	سنيئا طوالا غير راض بمُر قص

For the informal system surpasses in piety and character-building  
the formal one, which has no concern for (teaching) uprightness.

Woe to those who conjure to destroy  
What is built in the vestibules of the pious and learned.

In them Islam has been guarded and preserved  
From ancient to modern times, as in a safe-box.  
[...]

The saints, pious and righteous of the past  
Were all graduates of the traditional system.

How big is the difference between an authentic scholar  
and a secular one, who dresses up (like a scholar)...

A scholarship that brings about fear of God is far better  
than one that generates love of ostentation.

These words are not intended as a critique against anyone  
But to support a pillar that has been made to shake.

And what else could I do, when I have been visiting them and known them  
For many long years, without indulging in amusements.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Gusau 1988, 46, 49. The author is mentioned in ALA II, 302–303, but his name there is mistakenly spelt as Kuni. This impressive poem is a long elegy (*rithā'*) for his teacher Shaykh 'Uthman Maihula, in over 1,300 verses, containing a detailed biography of the latter.



### 3 Traditional Islamic education in West and Central Africa

Most descriptions in the available literature point to the existence of a common system of Islamic education adopted across West and Central Africa throughout the pre-colonial period.<sup>9</sup> Like its counterpart in the pre-modern Middle East, this system was articulated into two, markedly different levels: an elementary level (the *kuttāb* of the classical North African and Middle Eastern world) and a higher level (called in the Arab world as *majlis* or *halaqa*). This was not only a difference in the level of sophistication of the notions imparted, but also a distinction between two conceptually different, though intimately linked institutions. The study in the *kuttāb* constituted a general initiation aimed at molding the social and religious being of a child, and ultimately transforming him (or her) into a Muslim. Training in the *majlis*, on the contrary, provided the context for the transmission of the specific skills and the associated behavioral dispositions of the specialized group of

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<sup>9</sup> Regional differences are usually relative to external aspects like funding (for example, the state-sponsored system of medieval Borno vs. the mendicancy of Quranic students in Hausaland) or on techniques that facilitated the integration of the schooling in the various rhythms of the social and economic cycles of urban and rural, agricultural and nomadic communities. Some useful descriptions (in chronological order of publication) of traditional Quranic schooling in various West African Muslims societies are the following: Santerre 1973, focusing on northern Cameroon's Fulani communities; Mustapha 1987, esp. 78–115, focusing on Quranic education in Borno (Kanuri-speaking area of north-eastern Nigeria); Cissé 1992, mainly concerning Mali; Hassan 1992, on the Hausa-speaking urban communities of northern Nigeria; El-Ghassem 1997, on the nomadic Hassaniyya of Mauritania. Of the above, Hassan's book will be particularly interesting for the reader of the present volume, as it includes a rich and vivid description of the aesthetic and material culture of writing that revolves around the Quranic school: techniques of production of inks and corn-stalk pens; materials and uses of different wooden slates; production of decorated slates; calligraphies on Quranic manuscripts and talismans; links between the decorative patterns of embroideries on gowns and hats, and those of Quranic illuminations. An unpublished thesis (Diagana 1989) provides a detailed description of one of the most ancient West African traditions of Islamic education among the Soninke of southern Mauritania, with interesting insights into both its elementary and higher levels. Another important contribution, focusing on the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria and mainly on higher Islamic learning, is Reichmuth 1998. The topic of higher Islamic education in West Africa is also addressed in Reichmuth 2000, Tamari 2002, Lydon 2004, Tamari 2006, and Hall/Stewart 2011. Selected studies on specific disciplines of the traditional West African Islamic curriculum include Chamberlin 1975 (mainly on legal studies, but includes also one of the best descriptions of elementary Quranic schools in Kano, 131–136), Tamari 1996 (on Quranic exegesis), Tamari 2005 (on Arabic literature), Brigaglia 2009 (on Quranic exegesis).

the ‘*ulamā*’ (scholars), as well as (for those who were exposed to it only occasionally), for the cultivation of specific aspects of practical and theoretical Islamic learning relevant for the daily life of an adult Muslim.

In the traditional *kuttāb*, the Quran is the only subject studied and the wooden tablet (*lawḥ*) is the only material support. The terms used for the *kuttāb* in West African languages usually refer either to the act of reading (Soninke: *xaran-yinbe*, from Ar. *qara’a*, ‘to read’), to the object of study (Bambara: *kuranekalan*, ‘place where the Quran is read’), or to the material support (Hausa: *makarantar allo*, ‘school’ (lit. ‘place of reading’) of the wooden tablet’, from Ar. *al-lawḥ*, ‘tablet’, ‘slate’, ‘wooden board’). In the *majlis*, on the contrary, the various disciplines of the traditional curriculum (*fiqh*, theology, grammar, literature, Sufism etc.) are studied by closely reading a book which in West Africa was, until fairly recent times, always in the form of an unbound manuscript of paper leaves (*ṣuḥuf*). The different supports of writing/reading used in the two stages of Quranic education (*lawḥ* and *ṣuḥuf*, wooden tablet and page leaves) reflect a Quranic symbolism that will be fully described later in this article.

In West Africa, the *majlis* is usually located in a vestibule attached to the house of a scholar. In some languages of the area, it is named after the new support of learning (the book), which has taken the place of the wooden slate of primary education (Bambara: *kitabukalan*, ‘place where books are read’). In other languages, it is named after the disciplinary training which takes the place of the Quran as the main object of study (Hausa: *makarantar ilimi*, ‘school of [multi-disciplinary] knowledge’). In yet other languages, it is named after the place where the sessions take place (Hausa: *makarantar soro*, ‘school of the [teacher’s home] vestibule’; Bambara: *bulonkonokalan*, with the same meaning) or after the tidy and quiet sessions which characterize its method (Soninke *maysi*, from Arabic *majlis*, ‘assembly of seated people’). As most of the following discussion is based on observations made in a northern Nigerian context, I will use the two Hausa terms *makarantar allo* and *makarantar soro* to refer to what is, in reality, a global institution attested in a much broader geographical space.

The two institutions have a sharply different visual and sensory impact. The *makarantar allo* has an apparently chaotic arrangement: a crowd of students of both genders, loudly reciting at the same time but at a different pace, over and over again, a different set of verses of the Quran. Each of the students reads from his or her own individual tablet and tries to outdo the voice of his or her neighbor creating a characteristic, apparently cacophonous chorus. Everything in the *makarantar allo* evokes the world of primordial, undifferentiated substance (*hayūla*), a world that is yet to be transformed into a meaningful cosmos by the hierarchies and differences created by God and sustained by religious law. It is the domain of children, whose

bodies bear the mark of sexual differentiation only in potency, and who are not considered by the religious law as legally responsible, rational Muslim adults (*mukallaf*) trusted with the responsibility of following the religious precepts.

The *makarantar soro*, on the contrary, is the world of adult (prevalently male) Muslims. It is a place of silence, clarity and structure, evoking the differentiated cosmos governed by the rational rules of religious law. Male students, usually forming an orderly circle, surround their teacher and take turns in reading from their books. Unlike the child of the *makarantar allo*, who is encouraged to shout his daily portion of Quranic verses as loudly as possible to surpass the voice of his peers, a man in the *makarantar soro* will patiently wait for a hint of the teacher to signal that it is his turn to read, and will soften the tone of his voice, while humbly lowering his head, whenever he asks a question. Through the tone of his voice and through almost imperceptible moves and gestures, the physical attitude of the student in the *soro* embodies the dignified self-effacement that is characteristic of the code of conduct (*adab*) of the *‘ulamā’*.<sup>10</sup> The two following pictures are taken in two sections of one of the most conservative (in terms of pedagogical techniques) institutions of Islamic learning of Kano city, the school of Malam Shamsu in Jar Kasa ward. The family who runs this school is linked to the oldest chains of transmission of the Tijāniyya in Kano and defiantly resisted the reforms in Islamic schooling promoted by the new networks of the Kano Sufi orders that, starting from the 1950s, aligned with the Tijāni revival led by the Senegalese Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse (d. 1975) and with the Qādiri revival led by the Kano Shaykh Muḥammad al-Nāṣir Kabara (d. 1996). In this sense, this school, along with a few others, can be said to represent the legacy of the oldest layer in the history of Islamic education in Kano.

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**10** The role of the informal institutions of higher Islamic study in West Africa has often been underestimated in the anthropological literature on the region, leading to the erroneous assumption that the level of the Islamic learning in West Africa was shallow and superficial. This assumption is based not only on a deep-seated prejudice concerning the role of literacy in pre-colonial African societies, but also on the impression left upon many observers and travelers by the elementary *makarantar allo*. Quranic schools, in fact, often held on simple mats by the roadside, were naturally the most visible dimension of traditional Islamic learning. Higher sessions of Islamic learning, on the contrary, always took place more discretely, and therefore disappeared from the picture in most anthropological accounts, leaving the wrong impression that the rote-learning of the Quran practiced in the elementary school was the only form of Islamic knowledge available in pre-colonial African societies. Tal Tamari’s studies on higher traditional Islamic education in Mali have been among the first to shed light on the qualitative aspect of traditional education in Muslim Africa (Tamari 2002, 92). In terms of the quantitative reach of Islamic learning, Ivor Wilks argues that basic Arabic literacy was almost universal among the adult male population of Salaga (northern Ghana) in the eighteenth century (Wilks 1968, 166).



**Fig. 3:** A traditional *makarantar allo* in Kano (*makarantar* Malam Shamsu, Jar Kasa ward).  
© Andrea Brigaglia.

## 4 Islamic initiation

The pedagogy of the *makarantar allo* deliberately encourages passivity. The study consists for the most part in the rote-learning of the Quran, with little emphasis on comprehension of the text.<sup>11</sup> Although many basic Islamic ritual practices (ablutions, prayers, fasting), cultural dispositions (associated with age, learning and gender) and beliefs (popular hadiths on angels, prophets etc.) are also learnt by the pupil of the *makarantar allo*, in most cases no formal textbook is used to impart this knowledge in an objective form. Today, most urban northern Nigerian Quranic schools have also introduced some basic textbooks taught

<sup>11</sup> For a thoughtful discussion of the role of memorization in traditional Moroccan education, see Eickelman 1985, 57–71.



**Fig. 4:** A study session at the *makarantar soro* of Malam Shamsu, Jar Kasa ward (Kano).  
© Andrea Brigaglia.

at the elementary level, side by side with the Quran.<sup>12</sup> These short textbooks, however, are always recent (twentieth-century) curricular additions to the *makarantar allo*, and they were introduced with all likelihood under the influence of the pedagogy of modern Islamic schools. In the context of the pre-colonial *makarantar allo*, the study of books of religious law, Hadith and Arabic grammar as independent subjects was never encouraged. The principle of memorizing sections of

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**12** The most common ones are the following three: (1) *Qawā'id al-Islām* ('The foundations of Islam'), popularly known in Hausa simply as *Kawa'idi*, an anonymous compendium of essential theology (basically, an ultra-summarized version of Muḥammad al-Sanūsī's famous compendium of Ash'arī theology known as *al-'Aqida al-ṣuḡhrā*) and ritual practices (a summarized version of the chapters on ablution and ritual prayer from al-Akhḍarī's *Mukhtaṣar*); (2) *Tsarabar iyali gun mai basira* ('The gift to bring to the family, for those who have intellect'), a similar pamphlet, but in Arabic-script Hausa, written by Muḥammad Dan Almajiri of Fagge (Kano); (3) *Majma' al-baḥrayn fī aḥādīth sayyid al-kawnayn*, a selection of prophetic hadiths dealing with essential matters of faith, rituals and ethics, compiled by Kamāl al-Dīn Ādam Na-Ma'aji of Al-findikī (Kano).

the Quran before learning Arabic and understanding its meaning has long been discussed by classical authors. Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), for instance, defended this practice in his *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*,<sup>13</sup> arguing that among the masses, non-comprehension is to be preferred to miscomprehension, for the latter can lead to conflicting readings of the text and trigger sectarian conflict.<sup>14</sup>

The passivity that is so characteristic of the *makarantar allo*, is also to be related to the fundamental idea, typical of classical Islamic philosophy, that children in their pre-pubertal age have not developed a full '*aql* (intellect; in Hausa *hankali*). This idea is also reflected in the corresponding rule of classical *fiqh*, according to which the prescriptions of the divine law are only obligatory after a Muslim child has turned into a *mukallaf*, i.e. he or she has reached puberty. Until very recent times, no gender segregation and only minimal veiling for girls used to be enjoined in the *makarantar allo*, even in contexts like urban Kano, where the exclusion (in Hausa *kulle*) of adult women (after puberty and before the cessation of menses) from public space, was considered as the norm. In today's Kano, the absence of gender segregation between pre-pubertal boys and girls is the norm only in the most conservative Quranic schools. Modern Islamic schools, on the contrary, always organize the space into gender-segregated rows and tend to be very emphatic about the use of the veil for female pupils, even those of a very tender age.

At the *makarantar allo*, the Quran forms the entire conceptual horizon of the student's universe of meaning. Typically, the learning of the Arabic alphabet is not addressed as propaedeutic to the reading of the Quranic text. The names of the letters of the Arabic alphabet are learnt only within composite words, the first verses of the Quran being learnt as indissoluble units which are recited and memorized but never broken up into isolated letters. Ibn Khaldun reported that in his time (fourteenth century), this method was characteristic of elementary *kuttāb* pedagogy in Andalusia and the Maghreb, contrary to the Egyptian use, where isolated letters were taught first, the composition of individual words second, and Quranic verses were only taught at a third stage.<sup>15</sup> It is easy to see how the Maghrebian and West African system more closely reflects characteristic Muslim beliefs about the uncreated nature of the Quran. Introduced to the Quranic text as a

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Chamberlin 1975, 140.

<sup>14</sup> 'Under the circumstances, a shallow comprehension of the Qur'an, giving the student a false sense of mastery, would have been worse than no comprehension at all. The purity of the Qur'an would have been jeopardized and, with it, the perpetuation of the ideal and everyone's chance of salvation' (Chamberlin 1975, 141).

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Hassan 1992, 91.

whole, rather than to the individual letters of the Arabic language, the pupil will tend to be initiated to the signs of the Arabic alphabet not as a conventional, human-made code for the reproduction of sounds and the articulation of language, but as ciphers of God's eternal speech revealed to humans.

The various stages of the *makarantar allo* have already been discussed in the existing literature,<sup>16</sup> but a brief summary is needed here before attempting to unpack the symbolism of the wooden tablet that is of direct concern to us. The first stage is called in Hausa *babbaku* (the consonants). On the very first day (traditionally a Wednesday), the teacher writes the text of the *isti'ādha* (the formula of refuge that is normally read before starting to recite from the Quran: *A'ūdhu bi'l-Lāhi min al-shayṭān al-rajīm*) and the *basmala* (opening formula of all Quranic suras but one: *Bismi'l-Lāhi al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*) on the pupil's tablet. After the pupil has learnt how to read and recite these formulas, the teacher (or one of his senior students) writes the text of the *Fātiḥa* (first sura of the Quran) on his (or her) tablet. After memorizing the *Fātiḥa*, the pupil will wash the ink off the tablet and drink the water. He will then proceed in the same way for other suras, starting in reverse order from the shortest suras at the end of the Quran to the longest ones at the beginning. At this stage, only the consonantal body of the Quran will be written on the pupil's slate by the teacher or by one of his senior students, without vowels, so that the pupil will focus his attention on learning the consonants. The *babbaku* stage usually ends at sura 106 (Quraysh), that is, after the completion of nine of the final short suras. Having reached this point, the pupil will have encountered every possible grapheme of the Arabic language (all the letters in their initial, median, and final realizations, as well as certain distinctive combinations of letters like *lām-alif*, the *hamza* in its different positions etc.), at least once. During this process, the student will be helped to learn all these graphemes by a special naming system in the Hausa language. Contrary to the standard Arabic naming system, which identifies each letter with the same name for all its possible graphic realizations (initial, median, final), Hausa has a different name for each single grapheme. Example: *jīm-karami* (literally, small *jīm*) for the initial *jīm*; *jīm-saḍe* (literally, *jīm*-twisted) for the median *jīm*; *jīm-saḍe koma-baya* (literally, *jīm*-twisted and retorted) for the final *jīm*. This nomenclature has been devised to facilitate the learning of the different written realization for a Hausa-speaking pupil.<sup>17</sup> The letters are also learnt in the order in which they appear in the Quran,

<sup>16</sup> Especially Hassan 1992.

<sup>17</sup> For more details, see Hassan 1992, 83–88 and appendix no. III, as well as McIntyre 1984. Only a systematic comparison with other languages of the area (Kanuri, Fulfulde, Songhay, Shuwa

starting with the *isti'ādha* (*alu, am-baki, wau, zalun...*, i.e.: *alif, 'ayn, wāw, dhāl*, etc.).

The second stage of the *makarantar allo* is called *farfaru* (the vowels). During the *farfaru* stage, the student learns to write by himself the same suras he had previously learnt to read during the *babbaku* stage, while at the same time adding the vowels to the consonantal body of the text. This is followed by a third stage, *hajjatu* (syllabbling), where the pupil is taught for the first time how to compose independent syllabic units (*ba, bi, bu; ta, ti, tu*; etc.) to write words. At the same time, during the *hajjatu* stage the pupil writes, memorizes and washes some of the longer suras off his wooden slate. In the tradition of western and southern Hausaland (Sokoto, Kebbi, Kano, Katsina and Zaria), only the final, shortest suras would be memorized by most students, and the teacher would normally let the students wash their daily Quranic passage off their wooden slates immediately after they have demonstrated that they can read it properly, even without memorizing it. In eastern Hausaland (eastern Kano and Hadejiya), on the other hand, there used to be more emphasis on memorization, and teachers would not allow their students to wash their daily lesson off the wooden slates until they had memorized it. This was certainly due to the influence of neighboring Borno (northeastern Nigeria), where Quranic schools were known for their stronger emphasis on memorization. Today, even where the traditional Quranic schools are still in place, the borders between regional variations are more diluted, and hybrid systems are more likely to be found.

Traditionally, at the end of the *makarantar allo*, after a student had completed the writing of the whole Quran on his wooden slate, a graduation ceremony would take place. During this ceremony, the new graduate demonstrated his skills in front of his teachers, gifts were offered to the pupil and donations handed to the teacher. A special leather-framed, colorfully written and decorated Quranic tablet (*allon zayyana*) was also manufactured for the occasion and kept by the student as a sort of certificate. This graduation, referred to in Hausa as *sauka* (literally, 'descent'), has been correctly identified by Salah H. Hassan as a major rite of passage in traditional Hausa Muslim society. Hassan also advanced the hypothesis that the *sauka* practiced by the Hausas might be connected with similar ceremonies mentioned in Lamin Sanneh's monograph on the Jakhanké Muslim clerical clan of Gambia, as well as with those mentioned in an article by Leland Donald on Quranic literacy in Sierra Leone.<sup>18</sup> Considering the role that

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Arabic, Tamashek etc.) can reveal whether or not the naming of the Arabic letters is based on the same system.

**18** Hassan 1992, 95–100. The two works referred to by Hassan are Sanneh 1979 and Donald 1974.



Jakhanké/Wangarawa missionaries coming from the west had in the islamization of Hausaland,<sup>19</sup> such a connection is indeed very probable. The same practice, however, can also be traced back to a North African model, the *khatma* (celebration marking the completion of Quranic studies) described in the Moroccan colonial literature as follows;

La *khatma* est plus ou moins importante selon la fortune de la famille de l'écolier. Les plus riches tuent un chevreau et font un immense couscous; ils donnent au *faqih* un *douro* (cinq pesetas); les autres, selon ce qu'ils peuvent faire, donnent à manger du pain et du miel, du pain et des fruits secs (figues ou raisins), du pain et de l'huile, et remettent au *faqih* une petite somme qui varie de dix à deux billions (2 fr. 50 à 0 fr. 50).

[...]

Le nouveau *taleb* est triomphalement conduit de l'école chez lui avec accompagnement de *tabbal* et de *ghaïta*; il marche avec componction, le capuchon de sa djellaba baissé sur sa figure, de façon qu'il ne voit que le sol à ses pieds, et il porte comme un livre ouvert, dans ses deux mains, la planchette qui lui a servi et sur laquelle sont écrits au centre la *fatiha* et les premiers versets de la *sourate* « *Al-Baqara* » par un *taleb* ayant une belle écriture. Sur les côtés, en biais, sont inscrits les premiers versets de la *sourate* 48 La Victoire ou La Conquête qui commence par ces mots: *Inna fatahna laka fathan moubina* (Nous avons fait pour vous une conquête évidente).<sup>20</sup>

The production of decorated tablets—obviously associated with rituals like the one described above—is attested in Morocco and in the rest of North Africa.<sup>21</sup> What is possibly unique to northern Nigeria is the degree to which the *sauka* ceremony as a communal rite and the production of *allon zayyana* as a specialized craft have survived the profound transformation of educational practices that has occurred everywhere in Muslim Africa over the last five or six decades. In Kano, in fact, *sauka* ceremonies continue to be performed not only in the surviving traditional Quranic schools, but also in most government secondary schools. Here, the *sauka* marks the completion by a given class of the first cycle of reading of the Quran, which is part of the compulsory curriculum of Religious Knowledge for Muslim pupils in all government schools. For the ceremony, a decorated Quranic wooden tablet manufactured by specialized scribes formed in the traditional Quranic schools is handed to the students of the modern schools (who, in most

<sup>19</sup> Akinwumi/Raji 1990.

<sup>20</sup> Michaux-Bellaire 1901, 85–86.

<sup>21</sup> Some fine examples are sold in online galleries, like the one, from twentieth-century Rabat, available at the following link: <http://www.bruno-mignot.com/galleries/tables-coraniques/3685-planchette-coranique-alluha-tunisie-arabes.html> (seen 1 July 2016). In the late 2000s, I saw some Tunisian samples for sale in the souk of the Medina of Tunis.



**Fig. 5:** A modern *sauka* ceremony (Kano, 2012): young boys from Ummul-Qura Islamiyya school holding *allon zayyana* displaying the mosque pattern. © Musa Ibrahim (Kano).

cases, have never used an *allo* before!) as a gift/certificate. Thanks to the incorporation of the *sauka* ceremony into the modern school system, the production of *allon zayyana* in Kano, instead of declining along with the associated institution of the *makarantar allo*, has expanded significantly over the last years. The picture on the title pages, that I took in the Sanka ward of Kano in 2008, shows decorators of *allon zayyana* at work. The decorated tablets were commissioned by a school for its graduating students. The decorative patterns used in the *allon zayyana* have also diversified: while older *allon zayyana* always display variants of the geometric decorations found in the local calligraphic Quranic manuscripts, today's samples include a wider range of figurative designs, often a variation of the mosque or Qibla pattern.<sup>22</sup>

The role of the *sauka* ceremony as a form of social initiation into adulthood for Hausa Muslim boys and girls does not exhaust the complex set of multi-layered symbols that this ceremony encompasses. In his 1992 book, Hassan already sketched the argument that the full initiatic symbolism of the *sauka* ceremony

<sup>22</sup> For older versions of *allon zayyana*, see the examples shown in Hassan 1992, appendices VI.14–VI.20. More recent versions are shown here (figures 32, 33 and 41).



**Fig. 6:** A modern *sauka* ceremony (Kano, 2005): girls from a government secondary school (Women Teaching College, Kano) holding richly decorated *allon zayyana*. © Andrea Brigaglia.

can only be understood by looking at the tablet itself not merely as a material support of writing, but also as a dense religious symbol. In the following section, I will try to develop and expand on Hassan's intuition, arguing that the entire cycle of study at the *makarantar allo*, with its culmination in the *sauka* ceremony, should be understood not only as a technique for the transmission of knowledge, but also as an initiatory process marked by ritual practices meant to symbolically re-enact the Quranic revelation.

## 5 The heavenly tablet and the universal soul

The practice of using a wooden tablet as the main support of elementary Quranic education is historically attested throughout the Muslim world (in sub-Saharan Africa as in North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia) and is rooted in the

pre-Islamic Semitic (Jewish, Christian and other) Middle East. The limited availability of paper was certainly a major factor that continued to make the *lawḥ* an indispensable tool for Quranic schools in most of the Muslim world until fairly recently. Paper was very expensive and precious, and before the development of the modern paper industry, its use by small children was obviously considered as a senseless waste. This is not sufficient, however, to fully account for the significance that the tablet assumed during the process of study and memorization (*hifẓ*) of the Quran. As argued by Hassan, in fact, the *lawḥ* of the Quranic school should be seen not only as a material object, but also as a cultural symbol.

In a 2009 article, Anastasia Grib has tried to develop some of Hassan's intuitions. Analyzing an African decorated Quranic slate with zoomorphic symbols from the Brooklyn Museum of Art (New York), Grib concluded that the Quranic board should be seen as a space symbolizing the encounter between the Islamic ideas nurtured by the cultural elite of the '*ulamā*' and its local pagan clientele.<sup>23</sup> Two main methodological problems underlie Grib's analysis, severely undermining her conclusions. The first is the fact that the Quranic board described in the article, which the author connects to a pre-Islamic initiation ritual performed during the Neolithic in the western Sahel (as suggested by some paintings in a cave in Mali), is in fact from nineteenth-century Omdurman (Sudan). A paleographic observation of the script also suggests that it was actually penned by the hand of a Sudanese. The association between the material artifact (a nineteenth-century Quranic board from Omdurman), the ritual (a pre-Islamic, 'Pagan' initiation from the Neolithic age) and the location where such ritual was purportedly practiced (a cave in Mali) is too tenuous, both geographically and chronologically, to be meaningful. The second problem is that the zoomorphic images displayed by the Omdurman board, while interesting per se, are very untypical for a decorated Quranic tablet to allow for any generalization on the *lawḥ* as a religious and cultural symbol in Africa. While only occasionally attested on wooden tablets, however, such zoomorphic images are very common in talismanic practices that are widely documented in the region, as well as in the wider Muslim world. My conclusion, therefore, is that the Omdurman board preserved at the Brooklyn museum was not—as suggested by Grib—an *allon zayyana* used by a student in a syncretic Quranic/Pagan initiation ritual, but that it was the support used by a local practitioner for the production of a talisman—either designed to protect

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23 Grib 2009.

against snakes and scorpions, and meant for use by hunters and herdsmen, or designed to harm an enemy or a rival.<sup>24</sup>

While Grib sees the Quranic tablet as a symbolic space for the syncretic encounter between a 'local Pagan' ritual universe and an 'elitist Islamic' one, I suggest that the popular appeal of the *lawḥ* as a symbol lies precisely in the fact that the tablet is profoundly embedded in notions and ideas transmitted and sanctioned by the literate Islamic tradition. It is only in relation to the latter that its symbolism makes full sense. Seen from such a perspective, the African Quranic *lawḥ* as a material and cultural object is not the testament of the survival of a pre-existing 'Pagan' initiation superficially cloaked in Islamizing imagery, but is the support for a process of initiation designed to transmit and embody a system of beliefs and symbols that derive from mainstream (and by no means local) classical Islamic theology.

The *allo* of the Quranic school symbolically evokes and materially represents the heavenly tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz*) where, according to a notion alluded by the Quran and developed by classical Islamic theology, the divine archetype of the holy book is kept by God unaltered, and the events destined to take place in creation are written. Salah H. Hassan already argued that 'the *allo*, as a medium for writing and transmitting the Qur'an, acquires the same sacred status originally associated with *al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz*'.<sup>25</sup> The idea that a Quranic archetype is preserved in a heavenly tablet is developed by Muslim commentators starting from verses 85:21-22, *bal huwa Qur'ānun majīdun / fī lawḥin maḥfūz[-in]* (Nay! This is a majestic Quran / in a preserved Tablet). The same verse can also be read, according to the Warsh transmission of the reading of *Nāfi'*, which is the traditional reading used in the Maghreb and West Africa, as *bal huwa Qur'ānun majīdun / fī lawḥin maḥfūz[-un]* (Nay! This is a majestic Quran / preserved in a Tablet). Besides containing the direct mention of a tablet, the Quranic terms used in verse 85:22 can also be understood to include an indirect allusion to the primary goal of the *makarantar allo*, that is memorization (*ḥifẓ*). The Arabic root *ḥ-f-ẓ*, in fact, whose primary meaning is 'to preserve' or 'to guard', is also used for

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<sup>24</sup> The writing from the Quran and the zoomorphic drawings were either designed to be washed off the slate and drunk or, more probably, they were drafted by the practitioner on the wooden board in order to be used as a model to be copied multiple times on paper, then enclosed in leather bags and carried by his clients in the form of talismanic belts, necklaces or others. The use of zoomorphic drawings is very common in the history of Islamic talismanic practices and though controversial, it is by no means an exclusively local, African phenomenon. For a broad overview of talismanic practices from various epochs and regions of the Muslim world, see Hamès 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Hassan 1992, 149.

‘memorization’. The appeal of the practicing memorization on a tablet, therefore, is reinforced by the association of the two terms (*lawḥ* and *ḥifẓ*, tablet and memorization) in the Quranic verse.

The belief that the heavenly tablet also contains the knowledge of God’s decree (*qadar*) is developed from another Quranic verse (75:22), according to which God ‘writes down’ events before they occur: ‘No misfortune can occur, either on the earth or in yourselves, unless it was set down in writing before we brought it into being (*illā fī kitābin min qabli an nabra’ahā*)’.<sup>26</sup> Muslim exegetical traditions also connect the heavenly tablet with the so-called ‘night of destiny’ (*laylat al-qadr*, see Qur. 46:1-6 and 97:1-5). There is no universal agreement as to what exactly happened on the ‘night of destiny’. For many commentators, on that night the Quran was made to descend (*unzila*) from the heavenly tablet to the lowest heaven (*al-samā’ al-dunyā*), where the angel Gabriel received it before starting to transmit it, fragment after fragment, to the prophet Muḥammad. According to a slightly different version favored by many Sufis, it was the Prophet himself who, on that night, received the Quran in its primordial form, as synthetic unarticulated speech, directly from the heavenly tablet, before starting to receive it once again through the medium of Gabriel and in distinct portions, during the twenty-three years of his outward prophetic mission.

Regardless of who (the angel Gabriel or the prophet Muḥammad) is identified by different Muslim commentators as the recipient of the ‘descent’ of the Quran in the ‘night of destiny’, this first, synthetic revelation is always believed to have taken place from the archetype contained in the heavenly tablet. It is only in connection to a second, distinctive phase of the revelation, that commentators refer to the ‘page leaves’ (*ṣuḥuf*) mentioned by another verse of the Quran: ‘This is a lesson / from which those who wish to be taught should learn / written on honored / exalted, pure pages / by the hands of noble and virtuous scribes’ (80:11-16). There is an obvious parallel here between the practices of traditional education and the process of revelation as it is imagined in the Muslim religious tradition: in traditional education, the illiterate pupil of the *makarantar allo* receives a first Quranic imprinting by way of passive rote-learning on a wooden tablet,

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<sup>26</sup> The same idea is also attested in the Jewish scriptures (Jub. 5:13; Enoch 93:2, 106:19). A full discussion of the theme of the heavenly tablet in the theology of Islam and in older Semitic religions is beyond the scope of the present paper.



**Fig. 7:** The image of a Quranic tablet from between the ninth and the eleventh centuries, in a column of the Cathedral of Palermo (Italy). © Giulia Sajeve.

while the mature pupil of the *makarantar soro* receives the analytical teaching of Islam by the medium of ‘lessons’ taken from books studied on ‘paper leaves’: just as in the process of divine revelation to the Prophet, so too in the Quranic school, knowledge acquired from the *lawḥ* precedes knowledge acquired from the *ṣuḥuf*. In both cases, the first is synthetic and inarticulate, while the second is analytic and intellectually discernible.

The web of symbols encompassed by the institution of the *makarantar allo* does not end here. Besides being a tangible symbol of a macrocosmic reality (the heavenly tablet), the wooden tablet can also be seen, on the microcosmic level, as a representation of the human form. Before discussing this dimension of the symbolism of the *lawḥ*, a brief digression is necessary in order to provide some descriptive data about the shape that the tablet assumes in different regions. With the limited evidence available from pre-colonial times, it is impossible to reconstruct the changes that the shape of the *lawḥ* underwent in the course of history. Indirect clues might come from archeological evidence. One interesting example is an engraving in the form of a *lawḥ* with Arabic inscription (Fig. 7), dating from between the ninth and the eleventh centuries, and found on a column of the Cathedral of Palermo (Sicily), which was previously the site of a mosque. The shape

of this *lawḥ* is strikingly similar to the one used today in Nigeria and the Central Sudan. Other ancient examples might be found in many areas of the Muslim world.

For the twentieth century, anthropological evidence supported by a wealth of photographic documentation allows us to identify a number of clear regional variant shapes of the Quranic tablet in different areas of the African continent, as described in the table below.

**Tab. 1:** A tentative typology of Quranic tablets used in various regions of Africa.

Distribution	Shape	Additional markers
Maghreb	Trapezoidal. One of the horizontal edges (usually the top one) is longer than the other one. Orientation is, in most cases, vertical (portrait).	No handle (head), no stand (foot). In the decorated forms, it often has a hole in the top, which is used to pass in a rope and hang it against a wall.
Libya	Perfectly rectangular. Vertical orientation.	Simple handle (head) in the shape of an upturned triangle or oval. <sup>27</sup>
Western Sudan (Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Guinea etc.)	Classical shape of a grave-stone: one horizontal edge (the top or bottom one) is straight, while the other one is curved.	The Western Sudanic tablet can be realized in three different variants which can appear in the same town and even in the same school, as shown by Fig. 8 (from Mauritania) where they are all represented. The first and most common has no handle; the second has one handle in the middle of the flat edge; the third has two handles on the flat edge.
Central Sudan (Nigeria, Niger, northern Cameroon, Chad, Sudan)	Anthropomorphic shape.	The tablet always has a 'head' which can be realized either in the form of an upturned triangle/oval (for junior students) or in the form of a small stick (with a crescent). The tablet usually stands on two 'feet' realized by cutting the bottom side into a concave downward curve, although the variant found in the Sudan is often 'feetless' (straight). Most of the examples shown in this paper are from Kano, Nigeria. For

<sup>27</sup> Images of Libyan Quranic tablets can be seen at the following link: <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/libyan-boys-read-the-quran-muslims-holy-book-at-the-al-news-photo/529095744>.



Distribution	Shape	Additional markers
Ethiopia	Rectangular and elongated.	an example from Abéché (Chad), see Fig. 9. For an example from Darfur (Sudan), see Fig. 10. The tablet usually has a handle in the shape of an upturned triangle/oval, as in Fig. 11. In most cases, it stands on no feet, but curious variants with one foot in the middle of the bottom edge are attested (for an example of the latter variant, see <a href="http://www.artethiopian.com/en/manuscript-ethiopian/36-amhara-quran-tablet-ethiopia.html">http://www.artethiopian.com/en/manuscript-ethiopian/36-amhara-quran-tablet-ethiopia.html</a> ).
Somalia	Rectangular and exceedingly elongated.	A small ‘head’ and two ‘feet’ appear only at times, as in the example shown in Fig. 12.



**Fig. 8:** Children from a Quranic school in Mauritania holding tablets in each of the three different shapes used in the Western Sudan. © Frédéric Bourcier.

**Fig. 9:** A Quranic teacher from the outskirts of Abéché (Chad) holds a tablet in an interesting variant of the typical, anthropomorphic Central Sudanic shape. In this case, the two tips of the half-moon (the ‘head’) are joined to the ‘shoulders’. © Andrea Brigaglia.



**Fig. 10:** Tablets from a Quranic school in Darfur (Sudan). © Bakheit Nur Mohammed (University of Bayreuth).



**Fig. 11:** Quranic tablets in Zabi Molla, Ethiopia. Photo by Sara Fani and Michele Petrone (© Islam in the Horn of Africa Project, University of Copenhagen).



**Fig. 12:** A Quranic School in the Somali Refugee Camp of Daadab (Kenya). Here, the tablets have the characteristic elongated shape used in Somalia. © Daniel Burgui Iguzkiza.





**Fig. 13:** From right to left, the typical *allo* of a *kotso* (junior pupil), of a *tittibiri* (intermediate) and of a *gardi* (senior student) in Hausaland; finally, an *allon zayyyana* made in Kano in 2014. The anthropomorphic symbolism of the tablet and its initiatic function are most evident in the changes the tablet undergoes with the passage of the pupil from one stage of Quranic education to the next. © Andrea Brigaglia.

From the images above, as well as from the many images from Hausaland shown in various sections of this article, one can observe that the anthropomorphic symbolism of the Qur'anic tablet is particularly marked in the Central Sudan, a region stretching from Hausaland in Nigeria to the modern Republic of Sudan. It is here that the shape of the *lawḥ* has, more clearly than elsewhere, the traits of a human figure. In Hausa language, the different parts of the *allo* are explicitly named after the parts of the body they ideally correspond to: *kan allo* ('the tablet's head', i.e. the handle), *kafadar allo* ('the tablet's shoulder', i.e. any of the two upper corners), *cikin allo* ('the tablet's abdomen', i.e. the surface used for writing), *kafar allo* ('the tablet's foot', i.e. any of the two lower supports). This correspondence had already been observed by Hassan, who also added that 'an *allo* which is not carved at the bottom or is lacking the two legs' is called in Hausa a 'paralyzed tablet' (*gorgon* [sic] *allo*).<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Hassan 1992, 156–57. It should be, more correctly, *gurgun allo*. *Gurgu* actually means 'limping' or 'lame person'.

Another interesting aspect of the anthropomorphic symbolism of the *allo* in northern Nigeria is the ostensibly initiatic/symbolic nature of the changes in the shape of the tablet's handle during the different stages of education. These changes occur when the pupil passes from the lower rank of *kotso* (or *kolo*; a three to five-year old pupil who has just started the *babbaku* stage as described above) to the intermediate one of *tittibiri* (a more advanced pupil, who is engaged in the *farfaru* and *hajjatu* stages) and finally, to the stage of *gardi* (a student who is able to write any section of the Quran on his slate and has started the process of memorization). While the 'head' of the *lawḥ* of a pupil in the *kotso* stage has the shape of an upside down oval, in the one used by a *tittibiri* and a *gardi* it assumes the shape of a crescent, usually covered with a 'hat' of leather. My hypothesis is that this change has to be related, once again, to the symbolism of the *makarantar allo* as a process of religious initiation. Before going through the first rudiments of the Quranic writing, in fact, the intellect of a pre-pubescent *kotso* is believed to contain, as undisclosed potency, all the possibilities of human nature, as represented by the oval appearing as the 'head' of the tablet of junior students. It is only after being initiated to the practice of Quran-writing, that the student's intellect is molded into that of a Muslim, as represented by the sharpened crescent appearing as the 'head' of the tablet used by intermediate and senior students.

The process whereby a tool of religious knowledge transmission like the *lawḥ* is infused with religious symbols, gradually disclosed in the course of the pupil's transition from childhood to puberty, is reminiscent of the following observation by Mircea Eliade which, though expressed in a somewhat outdated language, has substantial validity.

It is through initiation that, in primitive and archaic societies, man becomes what he is and what he should be—a being open to the life of the spirit, hence one who participates in the culture into which he was born. For as we shall soon see, the puberty initiation represents above all the revelation of the sacred—and, for the primitive world, the sacred means not only everything that we now understand by religion, but also the whole body of the tribe's mythological and cultural traditions.<sup>29</sup>

The anthropomorphic symbolism observed in the changes undergone by the shape of the tablet in Hausaland was not, in all likelihood, accidentally developed by the Quranic teachers and the associated guilds of craftsmen who used to produce their writing tools in Africa. That the association between the *lawḥ* and the human body is not casual, and that it is not exclusive to sub-Saharan Africa, is suggested by both anthropological and literary evidence. In North Africa, for

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<sup>29</sup> Eliade 1965, 3.

example, pupils were instructed to take particular care in hiding their tablet under their outer cloaks (in the case of boys) or veils (in the case of girls), when walking to and from the Quranic school (*kuttāb*): the tablet was so imbued with the pupil's own being that a furtive, unintentional look by a passer-by could easily transmit the evil eye ('*ayn*) to the tablet's owner.<sup>30</sup> Textual references to an anthropic symbolism<sup>31</sup> associated with the tablet (in this case, the heavenly tablet) can be found in classical Sufi literature. The Persian 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī (d. 1329), for instance, in his *Kitāb al-qaḍā' wal-qadar*, suggests that the heavenly tablet mentioned by the revelation is the 'universal Soul' (*al-naḥs al-kullī*) of the philosophers.<sup>32</sup> The same idea is echoed by 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 1428) in his influential work on the prophet Muḥammad's inner reality (*al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya*) as the 'perfect man' or 'universal man', the first creation of God and the first degree of cosmic existence. The universal man, says Seyyed H. Nasr, is 'the prototype of the Universe as well as of man by virtue of which man, the microcosm, contains within himself all the possibilities found in the Universe. The microcosm and the macrocosm face each other as two mirrors in each of which the other is reflected, while both 'echo' in themselves their common prototype, who is the Universal Man'.<sup>33</sup> Now, the universal man is identified by al-Jīlī also with the heavenly tablet<sup>34</sup>, which is thus also a symbol of the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*.

The correspondence between the metaphysical reality alluded to by Sufis as the 'prophetic reality' and the 'preserved Tablet' of the Quran is also mentioned in a very explicit way in a commentary by the twentieth-century Egyptian Sufi and hadith scholar Muḥammad al-Ḥāfiẓ b. 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Tijānī (d. 1978) on the prayer of blessings on the prophet Muḥammad known as *Yāqūt al-ḥaqā'iq*. According to al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Tijānī, 'Muḥammad's [metaphysic] reality (*al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya*) is a preserved tablet (*lawḥ mahfūẓ*) which contains the perfection of being altogether'.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> I am thankful for this observation to a Moroccan participant at the conference *Approaches to the Qur'an in sub-Saharan Africa*, Institute for Ismaili Studies, Toronto, 21 May 2011.

<sup>31</sup> Anthropic and not anthropomorphic, in this case, because at the level of metaphysical realities there is no 'form' as such.

<sup>32</sup> al-Qashānī 2005.

<sup>33</sup> Nasr 1997, 110.

<sup>34</sup> For a detailed study on al-Jīlī, see Lo Polito 2010.

<sup>35</sup> al-Tijānī (n. d.), 29.

## 6 Sauka as a re-enactment of the Quranic revelation

A final aspect of the *makarantar allo* needs to be discussed to complete the picture. There is a curious coincidence between the term which is used in Hausa for the ceremony that seals a cycle of Quranic studies (when the student has written and washed off from his tablet the entire text of the Quran once, from end to beginning) and the term used to translate the Arabic *nuzūl* ('revelation' of the Quran or other heavenly books). In both cases, the Hausa term is *sauka*. While the latter term is a literal translation of the Arabic *nuzūl* (literally, 'descent'), the fact that it is also used to refer to a pedagogical or devotional cycle of reading of the Quran (which in Arabic is rather referred to as a *khatma*, 'sealing') is curious. *Sauka*, in fact, is the most obvious translation for the first Arabic term (*nuzūl*), but not for the second (*khatma*).

A comparative look at other major languages spoken by Muslim groups of the region shows that the use of the same local term to translate the ideas of 'revelation' and 'completion of a cycle of Quranic reading' is not unique to Hausa, but recurs in many West African languages. The Nupe of central Nigeria translate both terms as *chi*. In Djerma (western Niger), *jumandī* (or *zumandī*) is used. The Adamawa dialect of Fulfulde (northern Nigeria) uses *juḃḃinki*. The various languages of the Mande cluster (whose various dialects are spoken between southern Mali, eastern Guinea, northern Côte d'Ivoire and western Burkina Faso) use *jiginj*.<sup>36</sup> In Wolof (Senegal) and Kanuri (north-eastern Nigeria), on the contrary, the terms used to translate the two Arabic terms of *nuzūl* and *khatma* are not the same.<sup>37</sup> This allows us to circumscribe an area, roughly delimited by the Kanuri-speaking areas of Lake Chad and the Wolof-speaking area of the Senegal river. This area corresponds to the historical region of influence of the Jakhanké clerical diaspora. This coincidence points to the possibility that a common Islamic lexicon was developed across different languages, probably under the influence of the pedagogical practices of a diasporic community. This might be a matter of interest for the historian, the anthropologist and the linguist. In addition to that,

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<sup>36</sup> I owe the information on Bambara to Francesco Zappa. On the meaning of Kurana *jigi[η]* in Bambara, see also Tamari 2002, 94. I am also indebted for the information on Djerma to Hama Issa Fadel (Paris), for the information on Fulfulde to Sani Abdallah (Kano), and on Nupe to M. S. Ndako (Abuja).

<sup>37</sup> I thank Rudolph Ware and Dmitry Bondarev, respectively, for the information.

however, such a correspondence suggests that a common ritual of Islamic initiation associated with a specific Quranic pedagogy was adopted by the ethnic groups of a large area.

To explain the use of the term ‘descent’ as a double equivalent of ‘revelation’ and ‘cycle of reading’ of the Quran, one has to look, once again, at elementary Quranic studies in traditional Muslim societies as an Islamic initiation process marked by a series of rituals. By using the term ‘initiation’, here I do not refer only to the social dimension of a ‘rite of passage’ that marks the transition from childhood into adulthood as discussed in an earlier section of this paper. Rather, I look at initiation as a religious ritual meant to transform the inner and outer self of the subject by inscribing the foundational myths of the group in the latter’s consciousness. A religious initiation, in this sense, is always connected to the re-telling or re-enacting of a myth of origin that explains, at one and the same time, the existence of the group (a clan, a religious community etc.) and of the whole of reality. As suggested by Eliade’s classical studies on the phenomenology of myth, in fact, a ritual is always the re-enactment of a myth by way of symbols,<sup>38</sup> and a myth is the narration of a ‘sacred ontophany’ which becomes the ‘paradigmatic model for all human activities.’<sup>39</sup> In this sense, the ultimate goal of a religious initiation is the symbolic identification of the initiate with a sacred ancestor and the reaffirmation of the ‘paradigmatic model’ that the latter has set *in illo tempore*.

It is in this sense that, by evoking a terminological correspondence between the revelation of the Quran and the completion of a cycle of reading by the student, the traditional system of Quranic education described in this essay becomes a ritual re-enactment of the myth of the Quran’s ‘descent’. This ritual, mediated by the tablet (which, as we have seen, is at that the same time a symbol of the Quran, of the Prophet’s ‘reality’ and of the pupil’s self) allows the initiated member of the group (the Muslim pupil) to symbolically identify himself with his ‘sacred ancestor’ (the Prophet Muḥammad).

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<sup>38</sup> Eliade 1964.

<sup>39</sup> Eliade 1959, 97–98.



**Tab. 2:** Quranic education as a ritual re-enactment of revelation.

	<b>Myth</b>	<b>Pedagogy/Ritual</b>
Event	<i>Sauka</i> (descent; revelation of the Quran)	<i>Sauka</i> (descent; completion of a cycle of reading)
Support	The heavenly tablet	The wooden tablet
Subject	An illiterate ( <i>ummi</i> ) prophet	A pupil who has not started to learn Arabic

In this way, the initiate participates in the ontophany of the creation of the universe as encompassed by the Quranic myth of the heavenly tablet and by the myth of the pre-existence of the ‘Muhammadian reality,’ which are two sides of the same coin. At the same time, he renews his commitment to the preservation of the group’s identity through the reaffirmation of the paradigmatic model (in this case, the practice of Islam) whose *raison d’être* is established by the myth.

## 7 Conclusion

At the conclusion of this analysis, the central argument of this article can be restated in the following way. The educational system of the *makarantar allo* should be looked at as a complex initiation process that involves various rituals and symbols. These rituals are structured around a thick web of analogies that allow the symbolic identification of the protagonist of the initiation (the child) with the protagonist (the Prophet) of the foundational myth (the revelation of the Quran) that establishes the group (the Muslim community). Louis Brenner’s insightful observation that the pedagogical methods employed in the traditional Quranic school ‘are fully consonant with the principles of an esoteric episteme in which layers of meaning are received gradually as an individual progresses through successive stages of learning’<sup>40</sup> remains valid, as well as Rudolph Ware’s more recent argument that ‘[i]f we begin to see embodiment as epistemology,’ seemingly arcane practices from the African periphery of the Muslim world

<sup>40</sup> Brenner 2001, 19.

‘might produce revealing insights about the history of knowledge in Islam’.<sup>41</sup> Building on, and adding to Brenner and Ware’s works in the anthropology of Islamic education in Africa, my essay suggests that in order to unpack the full significance of the symbols they embed, traditional pedagogies should be understood not only as practices of knowledge transmission, but also as initiatory processes based on the ritual enactment of mythical materials.

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## Section 2: **Around the Texts**



Dmitry Bondarev

# Islamic Education and Ample Space Layout in West African Islamic Manuscripts

**Abstract:** There is a distinctive type of manuscripts across the whole of West Africa characterised by ample space between the lines. This codicological feature seems to point to teaching practices wherein extra space is planned for annotations. This article attempts to draw a correlation between this specific layout and the content of the manuscripts, thus demonstrating that practices of Islamic education can be deduced from analysis of manuscript production. Following Introduction, section 2 discusses ample space layout relation to annotations in the Borno Quran manuscripts; section 3 focuses on the same features in manuscripts from Borno, other than Quran manuscripts; section 4 is a comparative survey of the Borno, Senegambia and Adamawa manuscripts in terms of the relationship between the types of texts and the ample-spaced layout. This comparison reveals a complex pattern of correlation between types of glosses, layout, titles of works, curricula and phases of education.

## 1 Introduction

West African Islamic manuscripts can be classified into different taxonomic types with respect to various codicological, palaeographic, philological, sociological and anthropological features – such as format and layout, script style and auxiliary signs, genre and language, social domains and cultural practices. The classification of the manuscripts along these parameters can give insights into the role the manuscripts played in a larger historical context. There is a distinctive

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The present paper is a revised, expanded and updated version of a presentation made on 3 September 2013 at the conference *The Arts and Crafts of Literacy: Manuscript Cultures in Muslim Sub-Saharan Africa*, held at the University of Cape Town, where I received helpful suggestions from the audience. I thank Darya Ogorodnikova for clarifying various issues concerning the manuscripts written in Soninke speaking communities of the wider Senegambia region; thanks are also due to the editors of this volume for encouraging me to submit an article based on the presentation. I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their proposing some important corrections, additions and improvements. The research reported in this paper was supported by Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft as part of the SFB 950. Special thanks are due to the Gerda Henkel Foundation for supporting collaborative research in the framework of the project ‘Safeguarding the manuscripts of Timbuktu’ which greatly facilitated the comparative aspect of this study.

type of manuscripts across the whole of West Africa which is characterised by ample space between the lines. This codicological feature seems to point to teaching practices wherein extra space is planned for annotations. Evidence from the Soninke-speaking community in Senegal where the preparation of such sparse-line layout was assigned to advanced Islamic students suggests that this practice was part of a planned educational process.<sup>1</sup>

It is not clear if there is a systematic correlation between this particular codicological feature and texts used in teaching, because the ample space layout spans a variety of textual genres, from legal and grammatical manuals to treatises on belief and exegetical works, such as the *Risāla* by Qairawānī, the *Mukhtasar* by al-Khalīl, the *Alfiyya* of ibn Mālik, and the *ʿAqida* of al-Sanūsī, to mention a few. On the other hand, there are genres (medical texts, works on astronomy, agriculture, literature and hagiologies) which are never written in the ample space layout, whether annotated or not, and yet many of them have extensive annotations. This article attempts to draw a correlation between this specific layout and the content of the manuscripts, thus demonstrating that practices of Islamic education can be deduced from analysis of manuscript production. To the best of my knowledge, such a three-way relationship between layout, content and educational practices has not yet been proposed for sub-Saharan material. Thus, as a first attempt of this kind, the present analysis is far from being conclusive and is more an invitation to explore the potential behind such relations than the result of comprehensive research. The preliminary nature of the study applies both to the material I have worked with for a long time and to the material only recently included in the scope of my research. With this disclaimer in mind, I shall first explain the choice and range of material presented here for comparative purposes.

The study bears on three sets of data. The first set is represented by the Borno manuscripts which were produced by Kanuri-speaking Islamic scholars of the Borno Sultanate in what is now northeast Nigeria, southeast Niger and west Chad. This Borno manuscript culture developed with extensive use of a specialised local language applied to Quranic and general Islamic education. Arabic – the predominant language of the main text – was translated into an archaic literary language, Old Kanembu, and its more recent variant, Tarjumo.<sup>2</sup> Most Borno manuscripts are held in private collections in Nigeria and Niger (see the link to the Old Kanembu Islamic Manuscripts digital archive, OKIM, in references to digital resources), although some can be found in public libraries in Nigeria and Eu-

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<sup>1</sup> Ogorodnikova's notes from fieldwork data in February 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Bondarev 2013; Bondarev 2014a; Bondarev/Tijani 2014.



rope. The commentaries in Old Kanembu are found in Quran manuscripts (9 copies digitised so far with the oldest Quran manuscript dating to 1669, and more recent ones to the early nineteenth century), in works on grammar and faith, and in didactic texts on jurisprudence. The amount of digitised material comprises more than 140 manuscript items photographed in Nigeria, Niger and Chad.

The second set of data are those manuscripts produced in the Senegambia region in Soninke-speaking communities or in the communities where a certain variety of Soninke was used as a language of interpretation and translation of Arabic texts, the languages of the scribes being Mandinka or other Mande languages linguistically related to Soninke. Featuring many annotations in a literary variety of Soninke (also known as Old Mande) and having many informative colophons, these manuscripts can be traced to the Suwarian and Jakhanke scholarly lineages who spoke Soninke and who propagated Islam from the Senegambia to the Upper Volta valley.<sup>3</sup> The Old Mande/Soninke material covers a time span from the end of the eighteenth century to the twentieth century, and probably up to our own times, given the fact that the tradition of writing talismanic texts in Soninke and other Mande languages has not disappeared. The current database of the digitised manuscripts with Mande glosses has drawn on recent findings of Old Mande/Soninke manuscripts (Dobronravin 2012) and on the DFG-funded projects at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC), University of Hamburg. Since 2012, the digital collection of Old Mande/Soninke manuscripts has been expanded, with the addition of 85 newly discovered annotated manuscripts. More than 8,000 digital pages are now deposited in the Old Mande Islamic Manuscripts digital archive (OMIM), which is a restricted access resource. The Old Mande/Soninke manuscripts have been identified in nine European libraries, and in many private collections in Senegal.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the third set of material is the manuscripts with annotations in Arabic, Hausa and Fulfulde preserved in the Modibbo Ahmadu Fufure collection kept

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<sup>3</sup> Bondarev et al. forthcoming; Ogorodnikova 2016; forthcoming. At the beginning of our research on manuscripts with glosses in Mande languages, 'Old Mande' was used as a cover term for varieties of the language found in the old manuscripts which formed an initial core corpus of our study. We knew that the language with many features similar to Soninke belonged to the Mande linguistic family but we were not certain about its precise linguistic affiliation and degree of linguistic dissimilarity from Soninke or other Mande languages. Subsequent research, however, demonstrated that the variety used in the initial core corpus of manuscripts is not too distant from modern Soninke, hence a more accurate term 'Soninke manuscripts'. We retain 'Old Mande' in the titles of the projects and repositories because they deal with various early manuscripts annotated in several Mande languages, including Soninke, Mandinka and Jula.

<sup>4</sup> Bondarev et al. forthcoming.

in Arewa House, Centre for Historical Documentation and Research, Kaduna, Nigeria. This collection of about 900 manuscripts originates from Adamawa region in eastern Nigeria where two Islamic manuscript traditions converged in the beginning of the nineteenth century: the old Borno tradition grounded in Kanuri-speaking communities and the Sokoto tradition with strong Fulfulde and Hausa cultural and linguistic layers. This merger resulted in what became known as Adamawa Emirate.<sup>5</sup> The Borno and Sokoto influences are most discernible in the types of Arabic script as well as in the distribution of languages relative to these styles. Thus, manuscripts with annotations in Hausa more often pattern with the angular Borno type of script, whereas annotations in Fulani often pattern with a more cursive style typical of manuscripts written among the Fulani scholars. When compared to the manuscripts from Borno and the Senegambia, the Adamawa material is especially interesting inasmuch as it seems to offer insights into the connective space between the eastern (Borno) and western (Senegambia) cultural areas.

The layout features of the manuscripts from Borno and the wider Senegambia region were initially studied as part of the project 'Writing and reading paratexts in West African Islamic manuscripts: a comparative study of commentaries on Arabic texts in Old Kanembu and Old Mande' which subsequently developed into the project 'Islamic manuscripts with a wide spaced layout as mediators of teaching practices in West Africa', both projects being integrated into the collaborative research SFB 950 at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, University of Hamburg. The manuscripts originating from Hausa and Fulfulde speaking scholarly milieus in what is now north and east Nigeria are the subject of a preliminary study affiliated to the 'Wide space layout project' and conducted by Musa Salih Muhammad, Arewa House, and myself.

This article focuses more on manuscripts of Borno origin with annotations in Old Kanembu, and this for two reasons. Firstly, they were better studied than those from other areas with annotations in Soninke, Hausa and Fulfulde. Secondly, the studies in the Borno manuscripts resulted in several interdisciplinary approaches which set up a framework for similar research in other annotated manuscripts, laying the foundation for the current projects mentioned above.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses ample space layout relation to annotations in the Borno Quran manuscripts; section 3 focuses on the same features in manuscripts from Borno, other than Quran manuscripts; section 4 is a comparative survey of the Borno, Senegambia and Adamawa manuscripts in terms of the relationship between the ample-spaced layout

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5 Abubakar 1977; Last 1967.

and the types of texts rendered in this layout, with subsection 4.4 drawing a preliminary hypothesis of a correlation between types of glosses, layout, titles of works, curricula and phases of education; section 5 provides some conclusions and outlines questions for future studies.

## 2 Ample space layout in the Borno Quran manuscripts

### 2.1 Preliminaries

Copies of the Quran produced in the eleventh/seventeenth and twelfth/eighteenth century Borno (Bivar 1960; Bondarev 2014a) are among the earliest known Islamic manuscripts produced in sub-Saharan Africa. Most of these manuscripts have wide margins and spaced out lines. Spacious margins as a codicological feature of the written Quran must have been known in Borno and her political predecessor Kanem much earlier – with the introduction of Islam in at least the fifth/eleventh century. This is because in the Middle East and North Africa, the ratio between the size of the page and the size of the writing space in the Quran manuscripts was already favourable to the margins as early as the third/ninth century. This can indirectly be inferred from the ratio of 2/3 between the height of the writing area and the height of the page.<sup>6</sup> Most of the extant Middle Eastern and North African Quran manuscripts came to us with worn edges or trimmed to accommodate later bindings and therefore it is impossible to tell whether the Quran manuscripts with lesser marginal space existed during that time.<sup>7</sup> (Déroche 1985; 1992). What is known is that there was significant variation in space between the lines and the extent to which this space was filled by the ascenders and descenders of the letters. On the one hand, most of the earliest ninth to twelfth century manuscripts show a tendency to fill up the entire interlinear space by the ascenders and descenders irrespective of density of the baselines (as can be seen in almost all specimens reproduced in Déroche 1992). On the other hand, the later Qurans of the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries from Iran, Iraq, Mamluk Egypt and Syria as well as Anatolia reflect a much more generous approach to the interlinear space.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Déroche et al. 2006, 167–173; George 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Déroche 1985; 1992.

<sup>8</sup> See James 1992, 34 (cat. 5, north-west Iran), 56 (cat. 10, Iran), 60 (cat. 11, Iraq), 78 (cat. 17, eastern Iran or northern India), 108 (cat. 23, Iraq), 110 (cat. 24, Iraq), 114 (cats 26 and 27, Iran), 126 (cat. 29, Shiraz), 142 (cat. 33, Iran), 148 (cat. 35, Iran), 154 (cat. 37 and 38, Mamluk or Iran),

There is a wealth of indirect evidence of a well-developed scholarly ‘bookish’ tradition in Kanem-Borno in the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries<sup>9</sup>; however, given the gap of more than 300 years between the latest of those thirteenth to fourteenth century Qurans (mentioned above) and the earliest dated *muṣḥaf* from Borno (1080/1669), it would be futile to search for Middle Eastern, North African or Iranian prototypes of these seventeenth century Borno manuscripts. Rather, this basic observation about the difference in layout of Middle Eastern and North African Quran manuscripts from the pre-twelfth century period as against the post-twelfth century manuscripts from Iran, Iraq, Egypt and Anatolia is taken as a typological point of departure. This rough comparison also allows me to stress that the later and somewhat more peripheral manuscript traditions feature wide space between the lines. This interlinear space seems to be a mere visual element of the overall design applied to the production of the Qurans in the Arab-speaking lands, while the manuscripts outside those lands are characterised by a distinctive functional use of the interlinear space, that is the incorporation of annotations in Persian and Turkish.<sup>10</sup> From this point of view, these latter manuscripts are comparable to the Borno Qurans, for they were all produced in Islamic communities with predominantly non-Arabic speaking populations.

The Quran copies in sub-Saharan Africa fall into three different types of layout determined by the arrangement of marginal and interlinear space: (1) wide margins and spaced lines, (2) wide margins and dense lines, (3) narrow margins and dense lines. There might be a fourth type, with narrow margins and spaced lines, but I have never come across any of this kind and – given the overwhelming co-occurrence of spaced lines with wide margins – it is unlikely that such a type exists. The two first types (type 1 = wide margins and spaced lines, type 2 = wide margins and dense lines) can be classified into (a) manuscripts with annotations and (b) those without annotations. Type 3 (narrow margins with dense lines) does not typically have annotations, unless the narrow margins resulted from later trimming or wear

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158 (cat. 39, Mamluk), 186 (cat. 46, Mamluk), 196 (cat. 48, Anatolia or the Jazirah), and 208 (cat. 51, Anatolia). There is no clear chronological line between the ‘earlier’ and the ‘later’ manuscripts and the differences in layout are better treated as tendencies. Thus, there are few Persian Qurans dating to the eleventh or twelfth century written in the so-called ‘Persian kufic’ script with wide space between the lines allowing for translation in Persian below each line, see Small 2015, 44–47.

<sup>9</sup> See the elaborated pre-fourteenth century layer of the *tafsir* tradition in Borno Qurans which points to intensive book based scholarship (Bondarev forthcoming); for a recent update on external and internal historical sources on early Borno scholarly tradition see *inter alia* Dewièrè 2008; 2012 and Bondarev 2013; 2014a.

<sup>10</sup> James 1992, 78–81, 126–129, 208–211; Efthymiou 2010; Small 2015, 44–47.

and tear (as, for example, is the case of the Quran manuscript from the Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Arab 402). I will briefly discuss the Quran manuscripts without annotations before turning to those with annotations, the latter being very important for the understanding of the significance of extra space for Islamic education and scholarly practices.

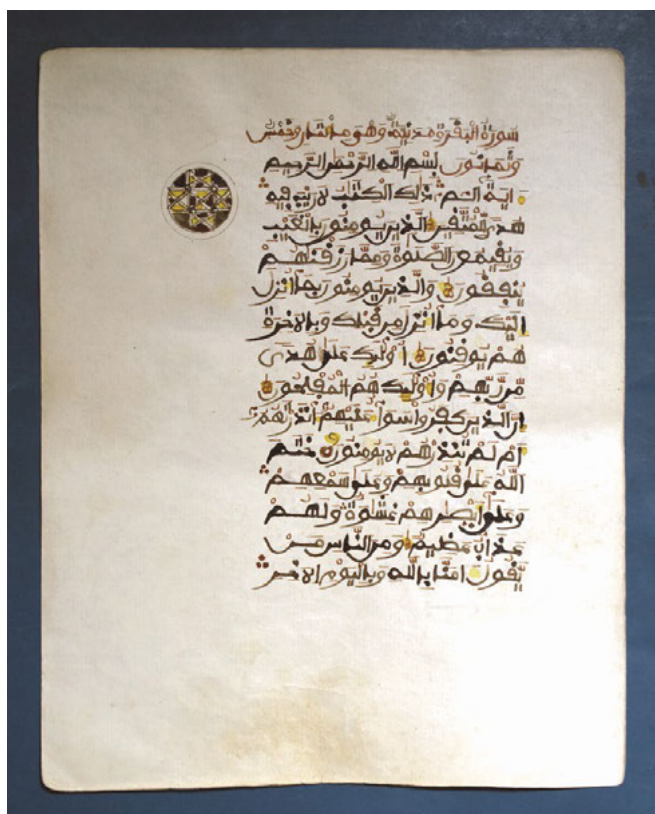
## 2.2 Quran manuscripts without annotations

Type 1 b (wide margins, spaced lines, no annotations) seems to be very rare. I am only aware of ‘Yunfa’s Quran’ (Jos MS 62) that dates to the late eighteenth century and supposedly belonged to the ruler of Gobir, Sarkin Gobir Yunfa (Fig. 1). The average size of its page is 15 × 20 cm and it has a fixed seven lines per page layout. Although the edges of the paper are worn, the width of the margins is still very impressive: the text area is only 5 × 11.5 cm, giving a ratio of 4:1 between the margin and the text space. The only annotation in the manuscript is a long passage about the virtues of memorizing the Quran, written in a different hand (surprisingly *suqī* – the script type popular in northern Mali, see Nobili 2011, 125–131).



Fig. 1: Quran, ‘Yunfa’s Qur’an’ manuscript. Jos Museum, Jos MS 62.

Type 2 b (wide margins, dense lines, no annotations) is in a way the epitome of the sub-Saharan Quran. It is the most frequent layout of Quran manuscripts, and has found its way into many codicological and palaeographic descriptions of such manuscripts, e.g. Brockett (1987), Contadini et al. (1999) and Déroche (2004, 87). The size of the paper is typically equivalent to bifolios folded in half, giving an approximate average dimension of  $16 \times 22$  cm (i.e. approximately 'quarto' size). The ratio between the marginal and text space ranges roughly from 1:1 to 1.8:1 (as in Brockett 1987 and Déroche 2004 respectively; these figures are given only as an orientation because calculating an average ratio would require a separate statistical study). Some larger size manuscripts feature even a higher ratio of 2.5:1 (margin vs text space) as in the manuscripts of Imam Yousouf of Nguigmi with the paper size  $28 \times 18$  cm and the text area  $14.5 \times 8.5$  cm (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2:** Quran. Nguigmi, Niger, Imam Yousouf's collection; Old Kanembu Islamic Manuscripts, Digital Collections, SOAS, London.

Type 3 (narrow margins with dense lines) is not a popular layout for Quran manuscripts, and it usually betrays lesser trained scribes. An example of this type is manuscript OR.636 in the Special Collection of the Cambridge University Library (Fig. 3).

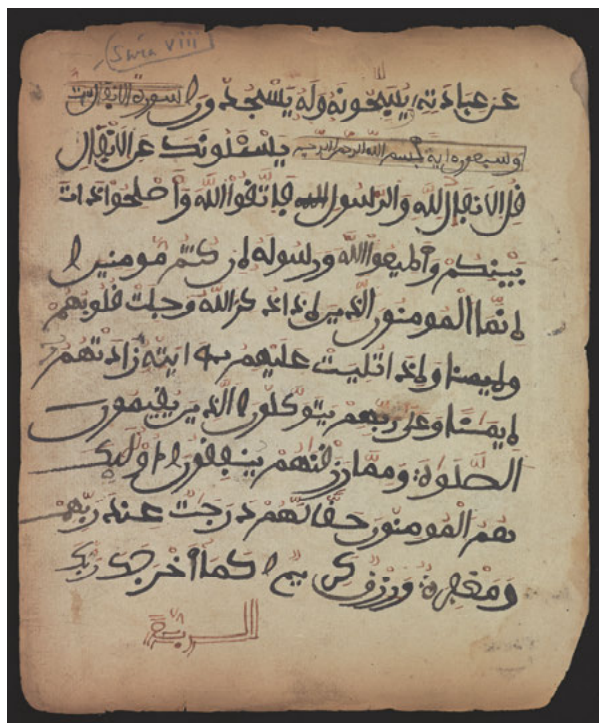


Fig. 3: Quran. Special Collections, Cambridge University Library. OR.636.

## 2.3 Quran manuscripts with annotations

Annotated Quran manuscripts are predominantly represented by type 1 layout (wide margins and spaced lines). Type 2 (wide margins, dense lines) does not seem to be very common and, presently, I am aware of only one such manuscript, that is MS. (N334) Arabe 402 in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Fig. 4). The sixteen-page section (folios 247 to 253) of this seventeenth-century Borno Quran has a 'quarto' format (i.e. the second fold of the original sheet of paper) but its current dimensions (19 × 15 cm) no longer represent its original size because the edges were trimmed to accommodate this fragment (from Q.68 to Q.98) into the



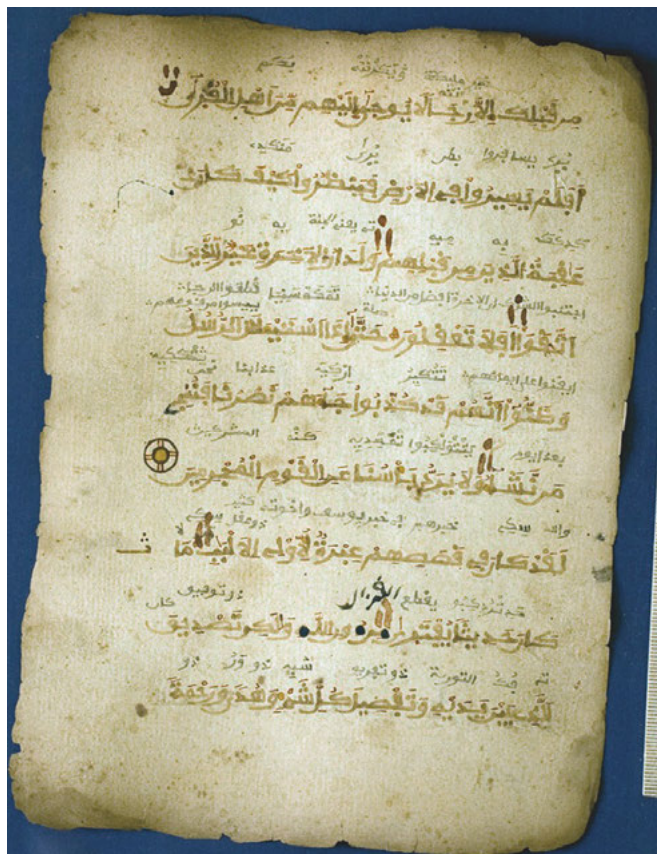


Fig. 4: Quran. Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS. Arabe 402, fol. 249a.

composite volume of the Quran.<sup>11</sup> The notion ‘dense lines’ is a relative term because the number of lines varies across manuscripts and the space density depends on the size of the paper. Therefore, it is difficult to calculate the precise difference between the dense and spaced manuscripts in terms of the number of lines. Fortunately, the dense-line manuscripts I have consulted so far differ from the spaced-line manuscripts in that they have almost twice the number of lines, leaving no room for overlapping or borderline cases. Thus, the MS. Arabe 402 (which I consider a dense line type) has 19 lines per page contrasted with the similar size MS. E. AR20–1, Kaduna National Archives, that has 9 lines per page (the spaced line type), as illustrated in Fig. 4 and Fig. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Déroche 1985, 48.





**Fig. 5:** Quran. Kaduna National Archives, Nigeria; Old Kanembu Islamic Manuscripts, Digital Collections, SOAS, London, MS. E. AR20-1.

Compared to other annotated Quran manuscripts, the MS. Arabe 402 stands out as an exception because the spacing between the lines hardly allows room for annotation. Nonetheless, the scribe who added the annotations in Old Kanembu (possibly the same person who wrote the main text) managed to squeeze these tiny glosses into a space of about 5 mm between the lines which are 10 mm apart. It is not clear whether the scribe anticipated the interlinear additions to this manuscript from the start. And even if he did, he must have intended to add only that quantity of annotations which was consistent with the interlinear space. However, the space proved to be insufficient for some of the longer glosses, resulting in crammed overlaying of words. In contrast, longer glosses and a variety of different commentaries are much better handled by type 1 layout to which I now turn.

## 2.4 Type 1 layout: wide margins and spaced lines

Two typical formats are found in annotated Quran manuscript from Borno: one is a large size *muṣḥaf* (average dimensions being  $33 \times 23$  cm, roughly corresponding to folio format, i.e. a single fold of the original sheet) and the other is half the size (the average dimension being  $20 \times 15$ , corresponding to a quarto format). The larger Qurans commonly have 11 to 12 lines per page as in the following manuscripts: MS.1YM, MS.2ShK, MS.4MM, Kano MS (all available in digital form on the OKIM website). The so called 'Konduga MS' has 13 lines (OKIM) and the MS.3ImI has a varying number of lines, from 11 to 15. The ratio between the margins and text area is approximately 1.7:1 in all manuscripts. Only two of the smaller (quarto) size Qurans are represented in the present corpus; both have nine lines per page and the ratio between the margins and text area is approximately 1.7:1 in MS.AR.33 (Kaduna, NAK) and 1:1 in the MS.E. AR.20–1 (Kaduna, NAK).



**Fig. 6:** Quran Jos Museum; Old Kanembu Islamic Manuscripts, Digital Collections, SOAS, London; Digital Repository, Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, Hamburg, MS.3ImI.

It is obvious that such a combination of interlinear spacing and wide margins provided enough room for annotations. In some of the manuscripts, the arrangement of annotations may seem chaotic, as on the first pages of MS.3ImI (Fig. 6), and in others there is a more orderly configuration of secondary writings. Fortunately, we have direct evidence that the annotations were already intended by the scribe while copying the main text. This evidence comes from one of the most densely annotated manuscripts, MS.3ImI (dated 1080/1669). After the last chapter of the Quran (*sūrat al-nās*) the scribe adds a quotation from the exegetical treatise *al-Taḥbīr fī ‘ilm al-tafsīr* ‘The composition on *tafsīr* studies’ by the famous Egyptian scholar al-Suyūṭī (849/1445–911/1505). The quotation discusses various authorities who disagree on the matter of mixing the Quran with commentaries and comes to the conclusion that it is permitted to write commentaries in copies of the Quran as long as they are used in teaching:

Abū ‘Ubayd narrated on the authority of Ibn Mas‘ūd that he said, ‘Free the Quran and do not mix it with anything else.’ It was narrated on the authority of Ibrāhīm that he disliked (writing) commentaries on the Quran, and Mālik said, ‘There is no harm in this (writing commentaries) in the copies of the Quran used to teach the youth, as for the master copies (*ummahāt*) then do not (mix them with commentaries)’ (Bondarev 2014, 143).

The flood of annotations in this manuscript shows that the scribe took full advantage of this right. The annotations were added in consecutive stages. The interlinear space was the first to be populated and the marginal the second. Within the interlinear space – as will be shown – we find different kinds of glosses, one type preceding the other. In order to better understand the relationship between the annotations and the layout it is important to explain the nature of the annotations found in the Borno Qurans.

## 2.5 Arrangement of annotations

Nowadays, traditional Borno ‘*ulamā*’ (scholars) interpret the Quranic Arabic in Old Kanembu applying their knowledge of Arabic grammatical structures as described in traditional Arabic linguistic treatises. The function of Old Kanembu is motivated by the grammatical module of *tafsīr* studies, which includes *i‘rāb* (nominal and verbal inflections), *ḥarf* (particles), *naḥw* (syntax) and other related disciplines. Although this curriculum package is an indispensable part of advanced Quranic education, the Borno ‘*ulamā*’ do not strictly adhere to Arabic linguistic theory, and also employ the distinctive linguistic properties of the Old Kanembu language. The sophisticated annotations in Old Kanembu incorporate four explanatory levels: (a) morphosyntactic, (b) phrase by phrase / lexical, (c) sentential and (d) interpretative

(the latter implicitly incorporating explications based on the famous Arabic exegesis *tafsīr al-Jalālayn*). Thus, the practice of interpretation of the Quran in Old Kanembu is built on two interrelated platforms: metalanguage (i.e. a language designed for the description of another language) and exegesis (i.e. interpretation of the text).

These four levels of presentation of the Quranic text reflect stages of formal language acquisition, namely learning Arabic together with literary Old Kanembu. The four levels are represented in both oral and manuscript forms. In the oral mode of Quranic teaching and learning, the teachers and students perform a phrase-by-phrase parsing of the Quranic text with an incremental increase of complexity in Old Kanembu output. The prosodic pattern of the Old Kanembu phrases delineates their terminus points. The pitch goes high on the last syllable of a syntagma and the vowel of that syllable receives prominent lengthening. These elements are usually final syllables of verbs or monosyllabic postpositional clitics and so the prosody highlights the morphosyntactic and phrase by phrase levels.<sup>12</sup>

The same four levels are reflected in the annotated Borno Quran manuscripts. The phases of language acquisition and processing of the Quranic text have distinct visual features which are as follows. Level (1) – morphosyntactic parsing – is represented by short graphemic items written above those Arabic words that are subjects and objects of verbal phrases, heads of prepositional phrases, nouns with genitive ending, etc. Level (2) – phrasal / lexical – is represented by short verbal and noun phrases written above the corresponding Arabic phrases. Level (3) – sentential translation – is seen in full Old Kanembu clauses written either interlineally or in the margins if interlinear space has already been exhausted by the preceding procedures. Level 4 – the interpretation that goes beyond strictly grammatical structures – is reflected in longer passages in Old Kanembu which may have lexical items that are translations of Arabic words of an Arabic *tafsīr* rather than of those given in the Quran.<sup>13</sup> These passages are also written in the margins. Finally, there is level 5 in the Quran manuscripts, namely annotations in Arabic quoted from many Arabic authored *tafāsīr*. These tend to occur in the margins, but sometimes also between the lines.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Bondarev 2013; Bondarev/Tijani 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Bondarev 2013; Tamari/Bondarev 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Bondarev forthcoming.

## 2.6 Glosses versus commentaries

Regarding content, function and placement on the page, the different kinds of annotations can be grouped into two more general categories: the interlinear annotations which I call ‘glosses’ and the marginal annotations which I call ‘commentaries’ (Tab. 1). Interlinear glosses represent translational activity based on the application of the Arabic grammatical tradition adjusted to the structures of the target language.<sup>15</sup> The four levels of Old Kanembu annotation can be grouped into two educational stages. The first is a strictly pedagogical stage (the morpho-syntactic level and phrase-by-phrase level) and the second is an advanced stage of Quranic education (the sentential level and interpretational level).<sup>16</sup> The first “pedagogical” stage predominantly occurs between the lines, whereas the second stage is represented in the margins (with the sentential level as a borderline case, sometimes occurring between the lines as well).

In contrast to the interlinear glosses, marginal commentaries reflect a more advanced level of scholarship whereby a larger body of texts in Arabic are used as sources for the exploration of the main text, e.g., exegesis (*tafsīr*) treatises in the case of Quran manuscripts with annotations in Old Kanembu (Bondarev forthcoming). Evidence that the interlinear type of annotation (glosses) preceded the marginal type (commentaries) is easily retrievable from the way the different layers or levels of writing interact with each other on the page, and from the pages of single manuscripts that preserve traces of phased production of the annotated *muṣḥaf*. I have illustrated the phases of accumulation of secondary texts elsewhere on the example of MS.AR.33 (dated 1117/1705; Kaduna, NAK).<sup>17</sup> This volume of the Quran was probably produced among Kanuri-speaking ‘*ulamā*’ in Hausa-speaking Katsina. Three folios selected from the manuscript demonstrate three separate text arrangements. The first is the Quranic text, the second is the Quranic text with Old Kanembu glosses, and the third is the Quran, Old Kanembu and an Arabic commentary (*tafsīr*). The *terminus ad quem* for the different types of annotations on the same page can be identified by how the glosses and commentaries mesh. The most conspicuous is the page from MS.3ImI (dated 1080/1669) which has the interlinear glosses in Old Kanembu written in a bright brown ink. The marginal space – into which the glosses occasionally run from the main text area – is filled by passages

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<sup>15</sup> There is a certain type of manuscript with intra-linear glosses, i.e. glosses written within the line following small sections of Arabic text in the same line. This type of annotation is beyond the scope of the article.

<sup>16</sup> Bondarev 2013.

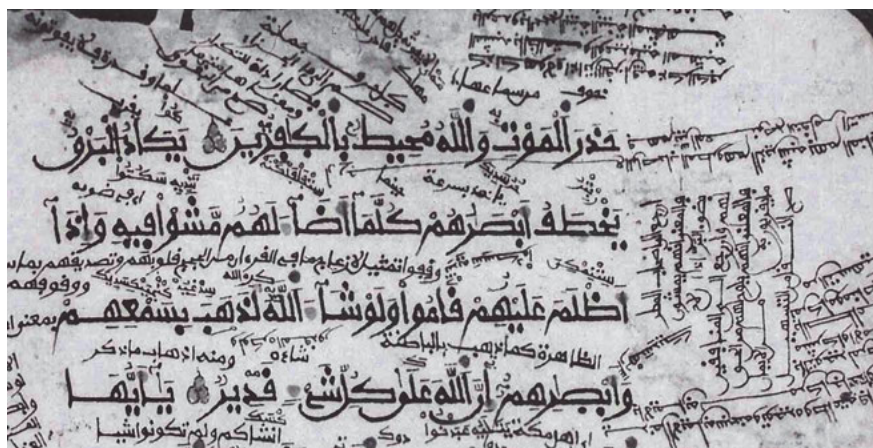
<sup>17</sup> Bondarev 2014a.



from *al-Tafsīr al-jāmī li-ahkām al-Qurʾān* by Abu ʿAbd-Allāh al-Qurṭubī (671/1273). The *tafsīr* quotations are carefully penned around the Old Kanembu glosses, showing that the glosses were written prior to the commentaries. The same order of writing is plainly reflected in other manuscripts. Figures 7, 8 and 9 illustrate the point.



Fig. 7: Quran, Q.27:49-61, *terminus ad quem* for the different types of the annotations. Jos Museum; Old Kanembu Islamic Manuscripts, Digital Collections, SOAS, London; Digital Repository, Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, Hamburg, MS.3lml.



**Fig. 8:** Quran, Q.2:20, *terminus ad quem* for the different types of the annotations. Old Kanembu Islamic Manuscripts, Digital Collections, SOAS, London, MS.2ShK.

**Tab. 1:** Glosses vs commentaries: two types of annotations in the Borno Quranic manuscripts.

Criteria (from formal to functional)	Old Kanembu (type 1)	Old Kanembu (type 2) & Arabic
	Not absolute but rather tendency	
1. Placement on page	Interlinear	Marginal
2. Length	Shorter	Longer
3. Authorship	Anonymous	Authored
4. Degree of dependence on text	Dependent on syntax and lexicon of the main text	Dependent on the meaning of the main text
5. Transmission	Mostly oral	Mostly written
6. Content variance	Predictable (significant consistency across different manuscripts)	Unpredictable (manuscript specific)
7. User's qualification	Lower level of expertise	Higher level of expertise
8. Recognition within the tradition	Called ' <i>tarjumo</i> '	Called ' <i>tafsir</i> '
→	Gloss	Commentary





Fig. 9: Quran, Q.21:95-104, *terminus ad quem* with Old Kanembu and quotations from al-Jalalayn, al-Wahidi's *al-Wajiz* & Samarqandi's *Bahr al-ulum*. Old Kanembu Islamic Manuscripts, Digital Collections, SOAS, London, MS.4MM.



## 2.7 Interlinear annotations and the spacing of the lines

We can now return to the question of the relationship between interlinear annotations and the spacing of the lines. Some annotations are written parallel to the lines of the main text and some obliquely (previous three Figures, 8–10). Although not an absolute rule, there is a noticeable tendency to write the Old Kanembu glosses obliquely, and the Arabic annotations parallel to the main text. This tendency is seen in MS.3ImI which has 15 lines on the page (Fig. 7) and especially in MS.2ShK that has 11 lines on the page (Fig. 10), the latter having more

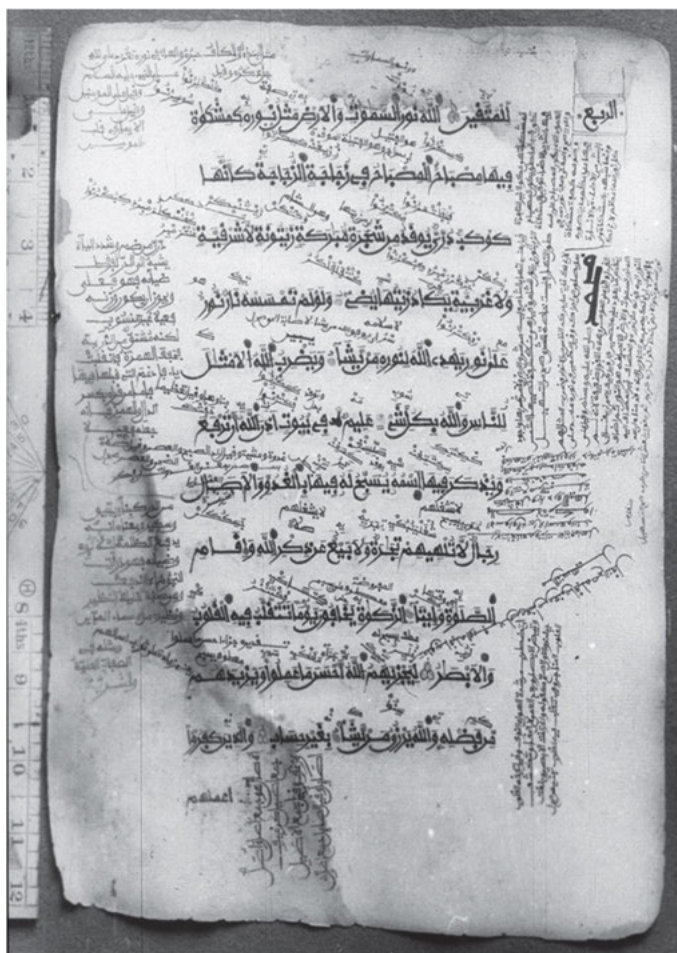


Fig. 10: Quran, Q.24:34-39. Old Kanembu Islamic Manuscripts, Digital Collections, SOAS, London, MS.2ShK.

space between the lines. Compared to the more tightly arranged MS.3ImI, the angle of the written glosses in MS.2ShK is much wider, with some glosses tilted at almost 45°.

As mentioned before, the interlinear glosses reflect a “pedagogical” stage of learning Old Kanembu which means that extra space between the lines was anticipated for this specific, less advanced phase of learning practice. These practices were expressed in the glosses written obliquely, i.e. those that take up more space. Thus, the linguistic and codicological features of the early Borno Qurans show an important correlation between the formal process of language acquisition (Arabic and Old Kanembu) and an almost standardised ample-spaced layout (see the ratios of margin to text area and the number of lines per page described earlier). The pressure of formal learning and teaching practices on the interlinear space is much more discernible in the non-Quranic manuscripts from the Borno area and other regions of West Africa.

### 3 Ample space layout in non-Quranic manuscripts from Borno

Compared to the Borno Qurans, the non-Quranic annotated manuscripts available in our digital corpus (OMIM and OKIM) are represented by much more recent specimens. The manuscripts from Borno date from the mid-nineteenth to the late twentieth centuries, the manuscripts from Hausa and Fulani speaking areas in what is now northern and north-eastern Nigeria date to the nineteenth / early twentieth centuries, and the manuscripts from the Senegambia span from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Most of the manuscripts of this particular ample space type are produced in the ‘quarto’ format, on average measuring 15 × 20 cm. The non-Quranic Borno manuscripts originate from a larger cultural area of Kanuri and Kanembu-speaking ‘*ulamā*’, including northeast Nigeria, south-east Niger and northwest Chad.

The method of inserting annotations at an angle between amply spaced lines which is already visible in the early Borno Qurans is fully developed in these non-Quranic manuscripts. The space between the lines has increased substantially, with only five to six lines per page. Consequently, the angle of the annotations is always wide – from 35° to 55°. In many manuscripts, this arrangement is made at the expense of the margins so that the text area becomes wider and the margins narrower, with the resultant ratio reversed in favour of the text area, as opposed to the Quran manuscripts. A 27-page manuscript of the popular didactic poem *al-*

*Murshid al-mu'īn 'alā 'l-ḡarūrī min 'ulūm al-dīn* by Ibn 'Āshir [ʿAbd al-Wāḥid b. Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. 'Āshir al-Anṣārī al-Fāsī] (d. 1630), is a typical example of this kind of manuscripts (Fig. 11). It has six lines per page with little marginal space but generous interlinear room filled up with the glosses in Old Kanembu written obliquely.

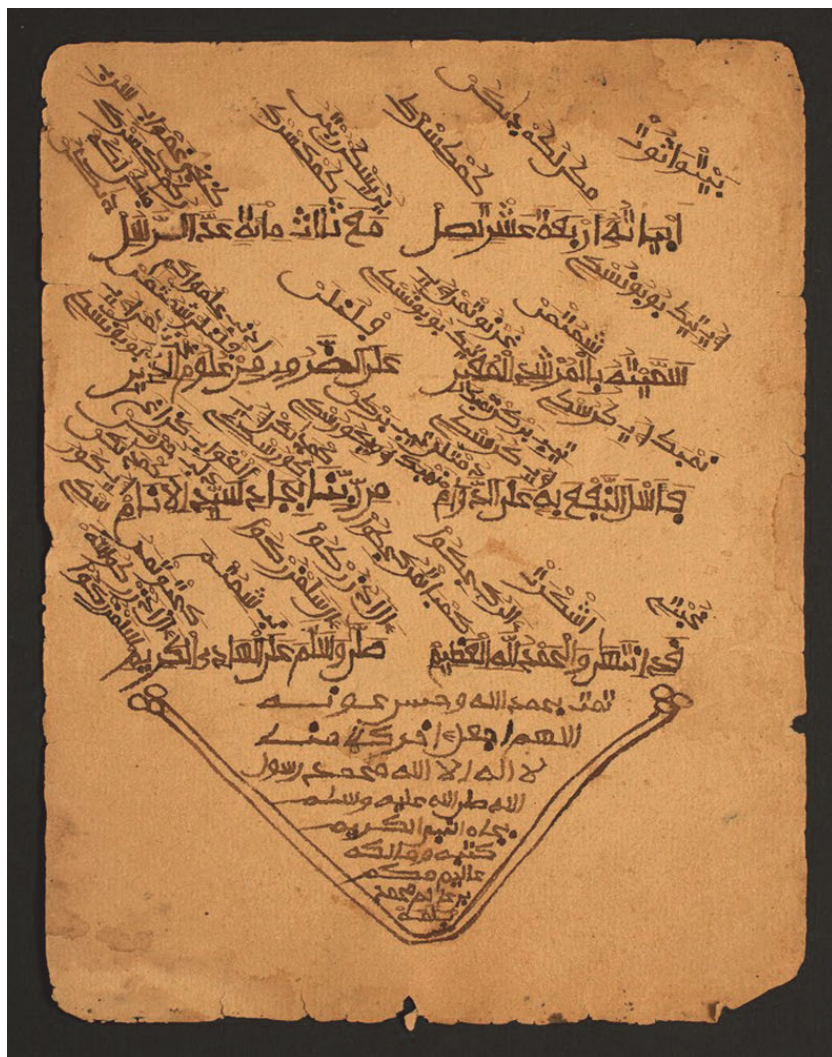


Fig. 11: *al-Murshid al-mu'īn* by Ibn 'Āshir. Maiduguri, Imam Shettima Habib's collection; Old Kanembu Islamic Manuscripts, Digital Collections, SOAS, London.

This is the same variety of Old Kanembu used in the earlier Quran manuscripts. However, there is an important difference in the type of glosses used for translation of the Arabic. If the Old Kanembu glosses in the Borno Qurans consist of four layers of interpretation, the *al-Murshid* manuscript has only two types of glosses, namely phrase-by-phrase (level 2) and sentential (level 3) representations, which render the Arabic text into Old Kanembu using a method comparable to parallel translation technique. Neither the morphological glossing (level 1) nor the broader interpretation (level 4) is present in the manuscript. It is not clear whether the annotations were written by the scribe for teaching purposes in the class or for private use. In the colophon, the scribe calls himself ‘Ālim (sic.) m.k.m. b. ‘Ālim Muḥammad Blama. If the first name ‘Ālim (the correct form would be *‘ālim*, ‘scholar’) refers to the scribe’s learned status rather than his proper name, it is possible that he performed teaching duties and that his manuscript (his ownership is also indicated in the colophon) can be broadly qualified as a teaching manuscript – even if there is no evidence of its usage in the classroom environment. If ‘Ālim is his personal name, then the scribe could have been an advanced student who practiced Arabic and Old Kanembu by way of copying and translating *al-Murshid*.

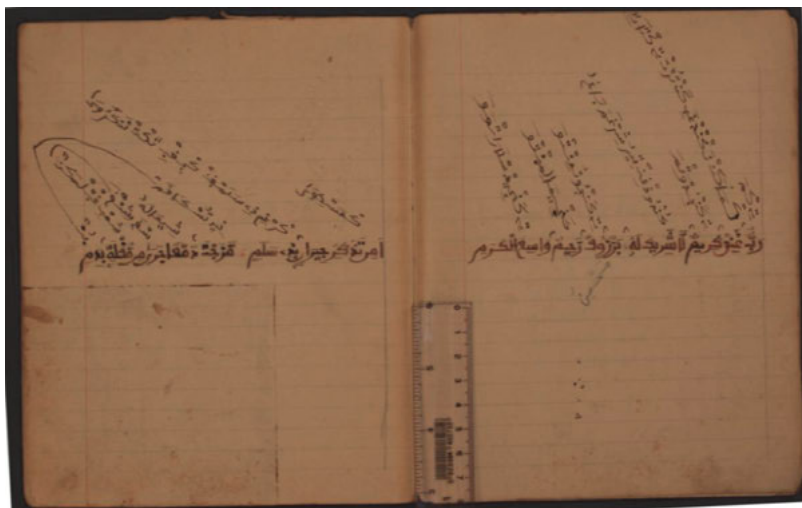
Some manuscripts have come down to us with oral explanations transmitted in the families of scholars or in the scholarly milieu. One such manuscript is a very short one-folio creed of oneness (*tawḥīd*) based on ‘*Aqīda ahl al-tawḥīd al-ṣuḡhrā*’ by Muḥammad b. Yusuf al-Sanūsī (d. 1486) (Fig. 12). According to the owner of the manuscript, chief Imam of Nguigmi, Imam Yousouf, the composition of the Arabic text and its interpretation in Old Kanembu were realised by his grandfather Muhammad Suma Lameen when he was the chief Imam of Nguigmi in the 1910s or 1920s. The Old Kanembu text is not a mere translation of the Arabic text but rather an interpretation of short Arabic sentences that summarise what is required to be proven as God’s attributes in relation to the emergence of the world. The annotations in Old Kanembu refer to a larger text of *al-‘Aqīda al-ṣuḡhrā* and thus represent the most elaborate interpretative level (level 4) which points to a much more advanced stage of scholarship and thus corroborates the oral information attached to the manuscript. But again, we do not know if Imam Suma Lameen wrote the manuscript for his personal use or for his teaching.



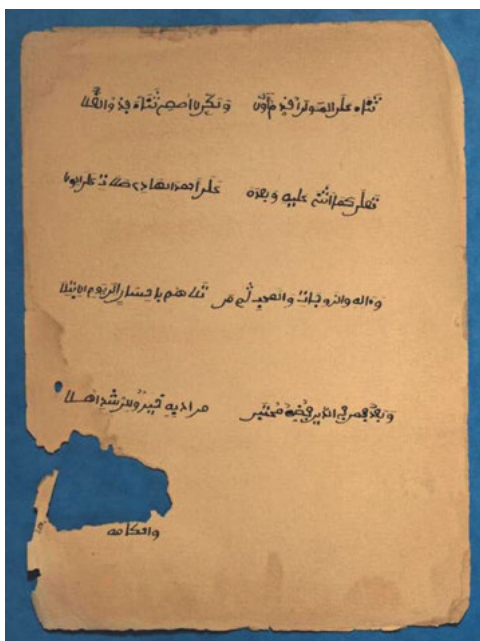
Fig. 12: Abridgement of *Aqīda ahl al-tawhīd al-ṣuḡhrā* by al-Sanūsī. Nguigmi, Niger, Imam Yousouf's collection; Old Kanembu Islamic Manuscripts, Digital Collections, SOAS, London.

One example of an ample space manuscript certainly written by an advanced student is a section from *Qaṣīda al-Burda (al-Kawāḍib al-durriyya fī madḥ khayr al-bariyya)* by Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Sa'īd al-Buṣīrī (d. 694/1294–6) (Fig. 13). The information about the scribe was given by the owner of the manuscript, Imam Shettima Habib of Maiduguri, who knew the student personally. The layout of this manuscript is the most spacious possible because there is only one line running across the page with the Old Kanembu text representing level 2 and 3 translations of the Arabic original. It is reasonable to assume that the space for annotations in all such manuscripts was anticipated and carefully prepared by the scribes from the start. Another item from Imam Yousouf's collection (Nguigmi) shows exactly this initial stage of preparation of the Arabic text for annotations (Fig. 14). The *fiqh* manual *Lāmiyyat al-Zaqqāq* by 'Alī b. Qāsim b. Muḥammad al-Tujībī al-Zaqqāq (d. 1506) is written in only four lines per page but for some reason it was never annotated.





**Fig. 13:** *Qaṣīda al-Burda* by al-Buṣīrī. Maiduguri, Imam Shettima Habib's collection; Old Kanembu Islamic Manuscripts, Digital Collections, SOAS, London.



**Fig. 14:** *Lāmiyyat al-Zaqqāq*. Nguigmi, Niger Imam Yousouf's collection; Old Kanembu Islamic Manuscripts, Digital Collections, SOAS, London.

## 4 Ample space layout and text types: A cross-cultural comparison

### 4.1 Borno

The significance of the annotated spaced-line manuscripts in the wider context of Borno Islamic manuscript culture (and in West Africa in general) can be better appreciated through a comparison of the texts typically rendered in the dense-line types and the texts rendered in the spaced-line type. There are certain genres which never occur in spaced-line form, such as historical accounts (Kanuri *gargam*), charters of privilege (*maḥram*), exegetical works, sections of *al-Risāla al-Qayrawāniyya* on the computation of inheritance, medicinal texts, works on astronomy, agriculture, and talismans. Among these dense-line type manuscripts whose layout allows enough room for marginal annotation, the *gargams* and *mahrams* do not feature any secondary writing whereas other dense-type manuscripts often have marginal annotations. Occasionally, interlinear glosses also occur there, crammed in miniscule writing into the tight space between the lines. However, the type of annotations in these manuscripts is very different linguistically from those used in the spaced-line types. The commentaries are predominantly in Arabic and, if the vernacular is used at all, the glosses are in Kanuri rather than in Old Kanembu. This type of manuscripts is indicative of either a non-scholarly context (e.g. *gargam*-s and *maḥram*-s) or of a higher scholarly context, the latter presupposing that the users of the manuscripts have mastered major disciplines within Islamic education.

This brief appraisal of the two types of layout demonstrates that there is a correlation between the spaced line layout and the types of texts rendered in it. One obvious tendency is the use of this layout for an intermediate phase of Islamic education wherein proficiency in the literary Old Kanembu language is important for a grammatical and lexical understanding of the Quranic and Classical Arabic (Bondarev 2013; Bondarev/Tijani 2014). It can reasonably be expected that texts transmitted in this layout belong to a particular intermediate syllabus of Islamic education. The titles of the works typically found in the manuscripts with amply spaced lines are indeed indicative of the intermediate stage at which foundational works are introduced to the students of Arabic grammar, the biography of the Prophet Muhammad, and the basics of Islamic law and theology.<sup>18</sup> These titles include (but are not restricted to) the following works.

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<sup>18</sup> See *inter alia* Tamari 2002 and literature cited there in 111, n. 35; Hall/Stewart 2011; Tamari/Bondarev 2013, 42, n. 28, especially literature.

**Arabic grammar:**

*Al-Muqaddima al-Ājurrūmiyya* (a concise treatise of Muḥammad b. Dāwūd al-Ṣanhāji Ibn Ājurrūm (d. 1223); *Al-Muṣannaf a-yā ṭālib al-i'rāb* (a poem on the study of rules of declension).

**Biography of the Prophet/devotional texts:**

*Qaṣida al-Burda* by al-Būṣirī (d. 1295/6); *Dalā'il al-khayrāt* by al-Jazūlī (d. 1465); *Al-'Ishrīniyyāt* by 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Fāzāzī (d. 1230).

**Islamic law:**

*Mukhtaṣar al-Akhḍārī* by 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Akhḍārī (d. 1585); *Lāmiyyat al-Zaq-qāq* (mentioned before).

**Theology:**

*al-Murshid al-mu'in* (mentioned before); *al-'Aqida al-Sanūsīyya* (mentioned before).

A similar pattern of correlation between the types of text and the layout is observed in the manuscripts annotated in Soninke.

## 4.2 Ample space layout in non-Quranic manuscripts annotated in Soninke

The language used in these manuscripts is a specialised scholarly variety of Soninke (of the Mande branch of the Niger-Congo language family) spoken in Mali, Senegal, Mauritania as well as the Gambia, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau. Scholarly Soninke survives in the manuscripts from the Senegambia region where it had a wide application in translational practices in many religious genres (Ogorodnikova 2016; forthcoming, Bondarev et al. forthcoming).

The glosses in Soninke can be grouped into three levels of grammatical representation: phrase-by-phrase, sentential and interpretational. Similar to the Old Kanembu glosses, the phrase-by-phrase level occurs between the lines and was almost certainly used for pedagogical purposes. The more complex sentential and interpretational levels are typically placed in the margin. In a few instances,





Fig. 15: *Jawāhir min al-kalām* by Ibn Sulaym al-Awjilī. Bibliothèque universitaire des langues et civilisations, Paris, MS.ARA.219bis, fols 7b and 8a.

the sentential level occurs both between the lines and in the margins. (Ogorodnikova 2016; forthcoming). Citations, cross-referencing and explanations in Arabic mostly appear in the margins and less frequently between the lines. As is the case with the Old Kanembu glosses, the annotations in Soninke are usually found in manuscripts with an ample space layout. The titles of the works used in these manuscripts point to the same intermediate phase of Islamic education as the Old Kanembu manuscripts.

Theology is the discipline which is most extensively represented in annotated manuscripts with wide space between the lines, whose titles include *al-ʿAqida* by al-Sanūsī; *Tajrīd fī kalimat al-tawḥīd* by Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī; the poem *Idāʿat al-dujunna fī ʿaqāʾid ahl al-sunna* by al-Maqqarī and two poems by Ibn Sulaym al-Awjilī (d. 1801/2) *Daṭīl al-qāʾid li-kashf asrār šifāt al-wāḥid* and *Jawāhir min al-kalām* (Fig. 15). In the field of law, the *fiqh* manual *al-Risāla al-Qayrawāniyya* was most frequently copied in the spaced-lines format with subsequent glosses in Soninke (Fig. 16). The devotional genre is mostly represented by al-Buṣīrī's poem about the Prophet *Qaṣida al-Burda* (Fig. 17) and a *Takhmīs* (in pentastichs) on al-Fāzāzī's *Ishrīniyyāt* of Ibn Mahīb (d. 1230).

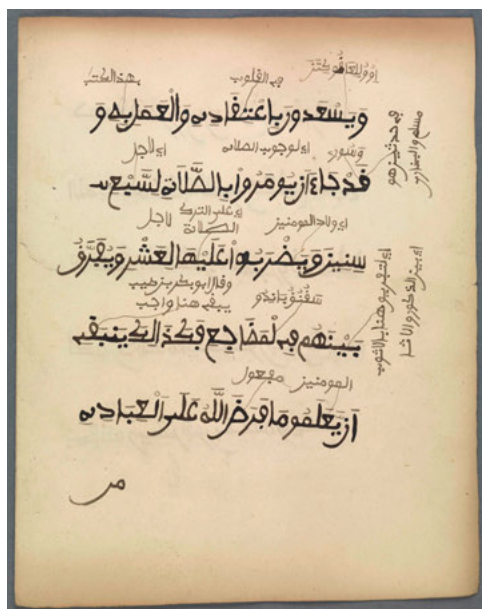


Fig. 16: *Risāla al-Qayrawāniyya*. Trinity College Library, Dublin, MS.2179, fol.6b.



Fig. 17: *Qaṣīda al-Burda* by al-Buṣṭī. Leiden, University Library, MS.Or. 14.052 (5) fol.2a.

### 4.3 Ample space layout in non-Quranic annotated manuscripts from Adamawa

A preliminary survey of manuscripts from the Adamawa collections held in Arewa House, Kaduna, also reveals a striking correspondence between the small number of lines per page and the titles of the works rendered in this type of layout. The following observations are based on my notes from a visit to Arewa House in November 2013, on a draft paper by Musa Salih Muhammad (Malam Musa), Chief Archivist of Arewa House (Muhammad 2014), and on a personal discussion with Malam Musa. There are four genres/type of texts that are predominantly transmitted in wide spaced layout (from 3 to 8 lines). The first genre is short versifications on grammar or lexicographic works such as AH/MAF122 *Alfiyya ibn Mālik* – 7 lines, annotations (Muhammad 2014); AH/MAF 141 *Qaṣīda b. Wurdi* [sic]<sup>19</sup> by *Zainuddīn Abu Hafsin Umar b. Muhammad al-Wurdi* [sic] which is a poem on grammar – 7 lines, annotations in Arabic; AH/MAF 82 Arabic/Fulfulde dictionary – 6 lines. The second type is devotional poetry including AH/MAF 95 *Burda* – 5 lines, annotations in Arabic; AH/MAF281 *Jawahir al-saqli* [sic]<sup>20</sup> by Abu Madyan – 6 lines, annotations (Muhammad 2014). The third type is a major work on legal matters *Mukhtasar al-Khalīl* (e.g., AH/MAF171 – 7 to 8 lines with annotations in Arabic and Hausa; AH/MAF182 – 5 lines with mostly Arabic annotations; AH/MAF255 – 7 lines, mostly Arabic, some Hausa) and various short texts also on legal issues such as AH/MAF294 *Qaṣīda fī bayān ‘ilm al-farā’id* by Sheikh Idris (7 lines, annotated) and many others (Muhammad 2014). The fourth genre is theology represented – *inter alia* – by the following manuscripts: AH/MAF283 *Tawhīd* (al-Sanūsī) – 5 lines, Arabic; AH/MAF 140 *al-Murshid al-mu’in* by b. ‘Āshir – 3/4 lines, Arabic and Hausa; AH/MAF 89 an abridgment of al-Awjili’s *tawhīd* – 6 lines, Arabic.

### 4.4 Defining phases of education

The wide spaced manuscripts from the Adamawa area, represented by the Modibbo Ahmadu Fufure collection, have wide margins just like the wide spaced manuscripts from the Senegambia with annotations in Soninke. This is however not typical of the spaced-lines manuscripts with annotations in Old Kanembu which do not feature particularly wide margins. More research is needed to understand whether these manuscripts (i.e. with wide marginal and interlinear

<sup>19</sup> Should be al-Wardi.

<sup>20</sup> Should be al-Ṣaqallī or al-Ṣiqillī (‘the Sicilian’).

space) were prepared for texts and teaching practices different from those mediated by manuscripts with wide interlinear space but narrower marginal space. One possibility could be that more marginal space was anticipated for more advanced studies with more extensive use of Arabic commentaries alongside the glosses in Soninke. But it cannot be ruled out that there was no systematic correlation between the two layouts and the genres and practices they represented. These speculations aside, it is worth noting that the intended choice of the language of annotations in the spaced-lines manuscripts is not always obvious. On the one hand, there is an observable tendency of reserving the space between the lines for the vernacular as demonstrated in the Old Kanembu glosses; on the other hand, the wide interlinear space is often filled with Arabic annotations as well, especially in texts known for their complexity and readily available together with derivative texts used in explaining the original texts.<sup>21</sup> Blurred boundaries between the Arabic and the vernacular as found in the layout under discussion will certainly defy an absolute taxonomy of manuscripts used in the teaching/learning environment. The multilingual features that do not fit into the general tendency described for the spaced-lines layout may be suggestive of a wider potential for this type of manuscripts, open to both intermediate and advanced users.

The layout of widely disseminated texts tends to be very similar (sometimes standardised) in format, as is the case with the Quranic manuscripts or didactic poems in manuscript form (Daub 2012/2013) or copies of *al-Nuqāyā* analysed by Rudolf Sellheim (Déroche 2006, 179, n. 65). The titles of the works represented in the amply spaced manuscripts discussed so far belong with texts which were widely known in West Africa and associated with a 'core curriculum' in Islamic studies in the region, as suggested by Stewart and Hall (2011) on the basis of the frequency of such texts in Sahelian libraries. The noticeable patterning of such features as annotations, layout, work titles, their popularity and relevance for a particular phase of Islamic education gives ground for a (tentative) classification of manuscripts according to their place in the phases of Islamic education. A remark on the terms 'intermediate' and 'advanced' is in order. I have used the term advanced with two degree adverbs ('less' and 'more') to avoid categorising what is a non-fixed, gradual and individual process of attaining knowledge in Islamic sciences in the traditional systems of learning in sub-Saharan Africa (see note 18).

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21 'Derivative' is used here in the sense of Hall and Stewart 2011, meaning secondary texts drawn from an original composition, for example, texts such as the legal treatise *Mukhtaṣar al-Khalīl* or the theological work *al-'Aqīda al-Sanūsiyya*.

As demonstrated here and elsewhere (Bondarev 2013), the glosses in Old Kanembu and commentaries in Arabic, especially in the Quran manuscripts, delineate the boundaries between the less and the more advanced phases quite unambiguously. This allows me to refine the vague notion of the advanced stage of education, defining two (less vague) categories: intermediate and advanced. Given the similarity between the practices of annotations in Old Kanembu and Soninke manuscripts, it is reasonable to apply the two terms to the general classification as shown in Tab. 2.

Thus, we can postulate three levels in the process of education. The first is an elementary phase of writing and reciting the Quran using wooden writing boards; the second is an intermediate level of instruction reflected in the annotated manuscripts, and the third is the advanced level represented by the dense-line scholarship manuscripts. This is still a coarse grain grouping that illustrates tendencies rather than absolute categories and therefore some latitude should be given to correspondences between the phases of education and identification features. The elementary phase is the clearest of all, having been well studied (see literature in Tamari/Bondarev 2013, 42, n. 28). The intermediate phase as defined by subject, layout and annotations, might also be a valid unified category even if, as mentioned earlier, it may overlap with the advanced phase. The latter can further be divided into sub-phases 1, 2, 3 and so on, depending on regional and personal peculiarities in approaching Islamic education, and a separate study is needed in order to better understand the relationship between the dense space layout and the texts and genres it mediates. Disciplines of Islamic education are given in Tab. 2 for both categories because (a) there are possible overlaps in studying the same text at both intermediate and advanced levels and (b) each discipline has several branches and subject matters, some more advanced than others.

## 5 Conclusions and further questions

The linguistic and codicological features of the early Borno Quran manuscripts show that the formal process of language acquisition (Arabic and Old Kanembu) correlated with an almost uniform ample-spaced layout. The pressure of formal learning and teaching practices on the interlinear space is much more discernible in the non-Quranic manuscripts from Borno, Senegambia and other regions of West Africa. These manuscripts have from one to seven lines per page, which leaves enough room for annotations written obliquely to the main text.

**Tab. 2:** Phases of education, subjects and manuscript format.

	Elementary (Primary & Secondary)	intermediate	Advanced 1,2,3...
Activity and objectives	Writing, reciting & memorising shorter verses of the Quran followed by the same for the entire Quran	Learning Arabic & learned vernacular; writing & reading Arabic texts	Further study of (complex) Arabic texts; mastering composition in Arabic
Disciplines (the most general)	Quran	Prophet Muhammad ( <i>madh</i> ) Arabic language ( <i>naḥw</i> ) Jurisprudence ( <i>fiqh</i> ) Belief ( <i>tawḥīd</i> ) Quranic exegesis ( <i>tafsīr</i> )	Prophet Muhammad ( <i>sīra</i> & <i>ḥadīth</i> ); Sufism ( <i>taṣawwuf</i> )
Material	Wooden tablet	Tablet <sup>22</sup> & paper	Paper
Format		Wide spaced lines	Tight spaced lines

## 5.1 Layout, annotations and education

The layering of annotations on the page seems to be conditioned by distinctive stages of learning reflected in the manuscript traditions of the Kanuri-speaking Borno scholars, Soninke-speaking scholars of Senegambia and most likely in other cultural areas such as the Hausa and Fulfulde scholarly centres in what is now northern Nigeria. On the basis of their placement on the page as well as their functional distribution, I distinguish between the interlinear annotations which I call ‘glosses’ and marginal annotations – ‘commentaries’. Interlinear glosses represent a pedagogical stage of translational practice based on an application of

<sup>22</sup> Reported for some manuscript cultures in Borno, Mali and Mauritania. In Borno until recently (before 1990s), all disciplines listed in the ‘intermediate’ column were studied on the wooden board. The students usually wrote a short passage of a text with wide space between the lines (three to four lines on one side of the board) and then inserted annotations by dictation from the teacher in order to memorise the annotations after the class (Imam Habib Shettima p.c.).

the Arabic grammatical tradition adjusted to the structures of the target vernacular language.

In contrast to the interlinear glosses, marginal commentaries reflect a more advanced level of scholarship whereby a larger body of texts in Arabic are used as sources for exploring the main text, e.g., exegesis (*tafsīr*) treatises in the case of the Quran manuscripts with annotations in Old Kanembu/Tarjumo or derivative explanatory texts (*sharḥ*) in the case of legal treatises such as *Mukhtaṣar* by al-Khalīl. The same is true for the Soninke manuscripts. Citations, cross-referencing and explanations in Arabic occur in the margins and rarely between the lines, e.g., in the manuscript of *al-Risāla* by Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (*al-Risāla al-Qayrawāniyya*) from Ziguinchor MS. ‘Risala Cissé Ziguinchor’ or in *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* (Ogorodnikova forthcoming). In addition to the Arabic, texts in the vernacular are also sometimes placed in the margins, both in the Old Kanembu/Tarjumo and the Soninke manuscripts, most typically representing sentential and interpretational levels of commentary.

That these phases of learning and scholarship aggregated sequentially from elementary to more advanced and from interlinear to marginal notes is especially visible in the Quran manuscripts with Old Kanembu/Tarjumo and Arabic annotations.<sup>23</sup> In most cases, these two types of annotation (interlinear and marginal) did not result from random opportunistic exploitation of the available space but rather were part of the planned process of manuscript production and use – from the design of the layout to the paratextual exploration of the main text. Thus, the annotated manuscripts without sufficient interlinear space do not have the sophisticated (grammar-oriented) glosses, and only feature marginal (non-grammatical) commentaries and occasional translations of single words. This indicates that different scholarly practices were purposively mediated via different types of layout.

The discussed correlations between the layout and specific types of annotation, layout and phases of education indicate that some of the annotated manuscripts originate from classroom activity (in a wider sense of teacher – student interaction), and some from personal use by advanced scholars. For example, among the Old Kanembu/Tarjumo manuscripts, typical classroom manuscripts would be the annotated Borno Qurans, works on belief and dogma (*al-‘Aqīda al-ṣuḡhrā* by al-Sanūsī, *al-Murshid al-mu‘īn* by Ibn ‘Āshir and their derivative texts) and versified didactic texts on legal aspects of Islam (*Mukhtaṣar al-Akhḍārī* by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Akhḍārī and its derivatives). The same manuscripts may be used at a significantly more advanced level of scholarship, like the Borno

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<sup>23</sup> Bondarev 2013; 2014a; forthcoming.

Qurans.<sup>24</sup> However, private usage by advanced scholars is most typically reflected in the manuscripts which represent works on legal issues (sources and branches of law), Sufism and medicinal texts. Annotations in this kind of manuscript are mostly written in Arabic with only occasional notes in Old Kanembu/Tarjumo or Kanuri.

Typical classroom manuscripts with Soninke annotations are represented by prose and versified works on faith and attributes of God (al-Sanūsī's *Aqīda* and its derivatives, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī's *Tajrīd fī kalimat al-tawḥīd*, al-Maqqarī's poem *Iḍā'at al-dujunna fī 'aqā'id ahl al-sunna*, and al-Awjilī's poems *Dalīl al-qā'id li-kashf asrār šifāt al-wāḥid*) and *Jawāhir min al-kalām*, as well as the manual on law *al-Risāla al-Qayrawāniyya*. These manuscripts usually have many interlinear glosses in Soninke and blocks of explanatory texts in Arabic and often in Soninke. On the other hand, the exegetical, medicinal and talismanic manuscripts originate from a more advanced scholarship. Similar distributional tendencies are probably observable in the Hausa and Fulfulde annotated manuscripts but more research is needed to make a preliminary generalisation (as attempted here for the Old Kanembu/Tarjumo and Soninke manuscripts).

## 5.2 Contradictory evidence

The frequency of the works mentioned in the Soninke manuscripts which were produced by Jakhanke clerics contradicts the received wisdom that the major texts transmitted among the Jakhanke lineages through learning were the exegetical text *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, a foundational work on Mālikī law *al-Muwaṭṭa'* by Mālik b. Anas, and the devotional text about the Prophet Muhammad *Kitāb al-Shifā'* by al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ (Wilks 1968; 2000, 98; Sanneh 1979, 158). It is thus reasonable to ask why the most frequent texts annotated in Soninke are the *al-Risāla al-Qayrawāniyya* and not *al-Muwaṭṭa'*, al-Awjilī's *Dalīl* and *Jawāhir* and not *Kitāb al-Shifā'* and why copies of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* are rarely annotated (one such copy from Bibliothèque Universitaire des Langues et Civilisations, Paris, has rare glosses in a variety of Soninke and another from a private collection in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, has infrequent glosses in Jula (Ogorodnikova, personal communication)). Different perspectives of research aside (i.e. evidence based on participant observation, interviews and the writings of sixteenth-century West African biographers [Wilks 1968; Sanneh 1979, 158] vs. material evidence based

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<sup>24</sup> Bondarev forthcoming.



on manuscripts), there may be factors as yet unknown which explain the annotational overrepresentation of one type of texts against the others. What is claimed as cultural heritage in more recent biographies and oral tradition is not necessarily representative of the transmission of knowledge over time, as observed, for example, in the change of exegetical paradigms in Borno whereby the *tafsīr* sources attested in the earlier Quran manuscripts are no longer recognised by modern day Islamic scholars as being part of the historical Borno tradition (Bondarev forthcoming). Interestingly, Hall and Stewart (2011, 114) also question the role of the *Muwaṭṭaʿ* in the educational process among the Jakhanke (Dyula), for it ‘cannot be understood as single discrete text’; they suggest that in order to ‘fully appreciate the level of sophistication of study of the *Muwaṭṭaʿ*’ ... we need to know the derivative forms of [it]... that were studied.’ It is important therefore, that we look for those derivative forms in our future research and see if they have similar wide space layout.

There are other facts which seem to be contradictory on the face of the manuscript evidence. Thus, the frequency of *al-Risāla* annotated in Soninke is well explained by the popularity of this legal textbook through the history of Islamic West Africa.<sup>25</sup> The same *Risāla* is not however among the most annotated manuscripts of the Old Kanembu/Tarjumo collections nor is it among the most annotated manuscripts of the Hausa and Fulfulde collections in Nigeria.<sup>26</sup>

Another composition, the *Mukhtaṣar* of Khalīl, was as popular as the *Risāla* but the manuscripts from the Senegambia do not have Soninke glosses, and only rarely are they annotated in Arabic, whereas the *Mukhtaṣar* manuscripts from the eastern part of West Africa originating from the Hausa, Fulfulde and Kanuri/Kanembu manuscript cultures are extensively annotated both in Arabic and the vernacular. The differences in the manuscript annotations of these two important and very popular texts may point to different channels and changing currents in the history of knowledge transmission in the western (Soninke) and eastern (Hausa, Fulfulde and Old Kanembu/Tarjumo) centres of Islamic learning.

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<sup>25</sup> For the Senegambia tradition see Sylla 2012; wider Timbuktu and Mali region see Saad 1983, 77; Tamari 2002; for Borno see Bobboyi 1992, 53–54; and for a general overview see Hall/Stewart 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Bondarev fieldwork 2013.

## Appendix: digital archives

### **Old Kanembu Islamic Manuscripts (OKIM):** <http://digital.soas.ac.uk/okim>.

This digital collection provides online access to one of the earliest written sub-Saharan languages in manuscript form – Old Kanembu. The content of the collection is constantly being updated and some items have more detailed metadata than others. OKIM is the outcome of the following three research projects: ‘Early Nigerian Qur’anic manuscripts: an interdisciplinary study of the Kanuri glosses and Arabic commentaries’ (2005–2007, funded by the AHRC, based at SOAS, University of London); ‘A study of Old Kanembu in early West African Qur’anic manuscripts and Islamic recitations (Tarjumo) in the light of Kanuri-Kanembu dialects spoken around lake Chad’ (2009–2011, funded by the DFG and the AHRC, based at SOAS, University of London and the University of Hamburg); and ‘Cognitive layers in West African Islamic manuscripts’ (2012–2013, funded by the DFG, based at the University of Hamburg).

### **Old Mande Islamic Manuscripts (OMIM):**

This is a digital collection of manuscripts with annotations in Soninke and other Mande languages from many European libraries and private collections in West Africa put together in the course of the projects ‘Writing and reading paratexts in West African Islamic manuscripts: a comparative study of commentaries on Arabic texts in Old Kanembu and Old Mande’ (2013–2015) and ‘Islamic manuscripts with a wide spaced layout as mediators of teaching practices in West Africa’ (2015–2019). Due to restrictions on copyright and ownership rights, the collection is only accessible to scholars (including visiting members) of the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC), University of Hamburg, through an administrative domain of the CSMC website.

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Susana Molins Lliteras

# A Preliminary Appraisal of Marginalia in West African Manuscripts from the Mamma Haïdara Memorial Library Collection (Timbuktu)

**Abstract:** This article presents an introductory incursion into the field of marginalia — otherwise known as paratext or annotations — in the West African Arabic manuscript tradition. Marginalia, often under-studied and marginalised, can be a valuable source in a number of fields, including the history of ideas, the transmission of knowledge, to social and economic history, and the production, circulation and reception of texts and manuscript collections. In order to locate West African marginalia in the broader context of Arabic manuscript production, and to provide a comparative perspective, the article begins with a brief outline of common types of marginalia found on Arabic manuscripts from other regions. The article then continues with its central contribution, the tentative classification and appraisal of marginalia found in a selection of West African manuscripts from a private family collection from Timbuktu, the Mamma Haïdara Memorial Library. Marginalia related to the text, such as corrections, addenda, clarifications, commentaries and highlights are quite common and share certain characteristics. *Signes-de-renvoi* and symbols — frequently letters, groups of letters, or words — indicate the nature of the notes in the margin. Some of these symbols are found in Arabic manuscripts from other regions, while others seem peculiar to West African manuscripts. Other common marginalia are independent textual fragments and ownership notes, found in manuscripts both from the Islamic East and West. The article, though preliminary in scope, may serve as an informal definition of the characteristics of marginalia in the region's manuscript tradition, thus providing a useful comparative device and hinting at the fruitful potential of related studies.

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An earlier version of this article was presented at the conference, *The Arts and Crafts of Literacy: Manuscript Cultures in Muslim Sub-Saharan Africa* (see Molins Lliteras 2013b), and forms part of Chapter 4 of my doctoral dissertation, Molins Lliteras 2015b.

# 1 Introduction

Over the last few years, marginalia have received increasing attention thanks to the growing significance of the history of the book and studies of reading practices in various disciplines. The study of marginalia is a subject of research in its own right, and not simply an ancillary source for the study of the texts in which they are found. As Heather Jackson contends: ‘Given the recent shift of attention from the writer to the reader and to the production, dissemination, and reception of texts, marginalia of all periods would appear to be potentially a goldmine for scholars. And so they are, but they are a contested goldmine.’<sup>1</sup> Some scholars, such as Robert Darnton, a pioneer in the discipline of book history, emphasise the importance of notes as evidence not only of events contemporaneous with the marginalia but also their utility in the re-creation of a history of reading and other textual practices.<sup>2</sup> For example, as William Sherman has shown, a shift of perspective from the producers to the users of books, demonstrates the considerable links that bridge the supposed gap between manuscript and print culture: ‘there are significant continuities across the “Medieval-Renaissance” divide — not only in the visual forms of books but in the transformative techniques employed by their readers.’<sup>3</sup> Thus, in spite of the critique of some scholars who point to the anecdotal nature of marginalia and question their reliability as sources to access the mentalities of those who left them,<sup>4</sup> they retain incontestable value as testimonies of the traces of readers and as intimate reflections of textual production practices in different contexts.<sup>5</sup>

In this article, I use the term ‘marginalia’, as it is universally understood across a range of manuscript cultures, and alternatively described as annotations or paratext. In addition, I draw on the definition of the ‘manuscript note’ as offered in a recent collection edited by Andreas Görke and Konrad Hirschler entitled *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources*: ‘The term will refer to any written material that is found on a manuscript that does not belong to the main text(s), irrespective of whether it refers to the main text and the legal status of the manuscript or is entirely unrelated to text and manuscript itself.’<sup>6</sup> Marginalia contain a wide range of subject matter, thus they are a rich source for a number of research

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1 Jackson 2001, 6.

2 Darnton 1990, 154–187.

3 Sherman 2008, 7.

4 Kintgen 1996, 214.

5 Jackson 2001, 234–258.

6 Görke/Hirschler 2011a, 9–10.

fields, from the history of ideas, reading practices and transmission of knowledge, to social and economic history, and biographical and library studies.

In the case of Arabic manuscripts and the different societies that produced them, little scholarly attention has been devoted to marginalia as sources in their own right. Nevertheless, Görke and Hirschler demonstrate that manuscript notes are of considerable importance as an additional set of documentary sources for the study of Middle Eastern societies, due to the rich information they contain. For example, ‘book owners applied their *ex libris*, readers signalled that they had read the text — or at least claimed that they had done so — some readers “corrected” the text or commented upon it, scholars wrote certificates of transmission, copyists left verses, owners used empty space for unrelated notes etc.’<sup>7</sup> Therefore, they argue that the study of manuscript notes as a genre sheds new light on many aspects of pre-modern Middle Eastern societies, which until recently only had recourse to letters and endowment deeds as documentary sources.<sup>8</sup>

Marginalia as sources have not only been under-used and under-studied, but have long been disregarded. The fact remains that most text editions and catalogues, with some exceptions, simply ignore the notes. Editions and catalogues are still limited to the “main” text, devoting only scant attention to other textual elements.<sup>9</sup> For example, looking at the existing catalogues of West African manuscripts on which this article focuses, the majority — published by the al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation and representing the most up-to-date knowledge of these manuscripts — contains no reference to marginalia, with the recent notable exception of the catalogue of a small collection, the Fonds de Gironcourt.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, codicological and palaeographic manuals and books on Arabic manuscripts have in recent years paid more attention to marginalia, in particular, with a view to the utilisation of such notes in order to date or to provide more detail on the history of a manuscript. Significant here are the pioneering works of François Déroche in *Manuel de codicologie des manuscrits en écriture arabe*<sup>11</sup> and Adam Gacek’s volumes, especially the essential *Arabic Manuscripts: A Vademecum for*

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7 Görke/Hirschler 2011a, 10.

8 Görke/Hirschler 2011a, 13.

9 Görke/Hirschler 2011a, 15.

10 The exception is Nobili 2013. The al-Furqan has published a number of catalogues from the region, including Ghana, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. For Timbuktu, the largest is the state collection, the Ahmad Baba Institute (IHERI-AB, formerly CEDRAB): Ould Ely et al. 1995–1998.

11 Déroche et al. 2000.

*Readers*,<sup>12</sup> which provide detailed descriptions and examples of the physical characteristics of marginalia in Arabic manuscripts and explanations of some of their roles in the textual history of Arabic literate societies.

If marginalia found in Arabic manuscripts from the Middle East are already under-studied and under-utilised, the situation is even more pronounced when considering the comparatively much less studied Arabic manuscripts from West Africa. In fact, this disregard for marginalia is part of a more substantial disqualification of these documents as “artefacts.” As Shamil Jeppie states, ‘paper and writing instruments, how texts circulated, how books were held together, and the chain of people involved in the production of texts — from merchants trading in paper, to writers and copyists, through communities of readers — are not found in even modest terms in general or specialist works about Africa.’<sup>13</sup> The tendency to see manuscripts exclusively as texts, as transparent vehicles for their intellectual content only, and ignoring them as objects with their own physical characteristics and idiosyncrasies, has led to the marginalia being overlooked. As Graziano Krätli argues, there is an urgent need to shift our primary focus away from the significance of the intellectual content of manuscripts to a more holistic view in which the manuscript as a physical object, ‘artefact, commodity and collectible’ is centrally addressed.<sup>14</sup>

This long avoidance of marginalia has entailed a loss through which we have missed opportunities in our collective research on manuscripts. Therefore, this article, although preliminary in scope, offers an introductory incursion into the field, outlining the main characteristics of West African marginalia and emphasising the potential insights that in-depth studies on the topic might provide. In order to locate West African marginalia in the broader context of Arabic manuscript production, and to provide a comparative perspective, the article begins with a brief outline of common types of marginalia found on Arabic manuscripts from other regions, highlighting studies that demonstrate the fruitfulness of such research. The article then continues with its central contribution, the tentative classification and appraisal of marginalia found in a selection of West African manuscripts from a private family collection from Timbuktu, the Mamma Haïdara Memorial Library. This library consists of one of the largest, better-known, and organised private manuscript collections in the city, including several volumes

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<sup>12</sup> Gacek 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Jeppie 2014, 94.

<sup>14</sup> Krätli 2011, 341.



of catalogues.<sup>15</sup> The article ends with a conclusion summarising the main characteristics of the various types of marginalia found in West Africa, which may serve as an informal definition of such characteristics in the region's manuscript tradition.

## 2 Mapping the field: Marginalia in Arabic manuscripts

Starting in the 1990s, manuscript notes became the focus of a number of studies of Arabic manuscripts. In particular, scholars such as Stefan Leder drew attention to audition and transmission certificates (*samā'āt* and *ijāzāt*) for their roles in the history of education and the intellectual history of a particular period. Ownership statements and marks (*tamallukāt*) also began to take centre stage, instead of being used simply as an additional source for the study of an individual manuscript.<sup>16</sup> This section describes the better-studied categories of marginalia found on Arabic manuscripts and some of the research which has placed these notes at their core. Apart from the notes already listed, study or reading records and collation notes (*muṭāla'āt* and *muqābalāt*) as well as independent textual fragments are also analysed here. The section ends by reflecting on the few publications that take marginalia seriously in the context of West African manuscript studies, in the hope that the contextualisation offered here can provide a useful comparative basis for the analysis of this latter tradition.

### 2.1 Certificates of transmission and licences for transmission (*samā'āt* and *ijāzāt*)

*Samā'āt* and *ijāzāt* notes are perhaps the marginalia that have been studied the most in the Arabic manuscript tradition. These certificates of transmission and licences for transmission are closely related to each other, as often a certificate of transmission may serve as the basis for a licence for transmission. These notes are usually found near the colophon or on the title page. They confer upon the recipient the right to transmit a text, to teach it, or to issue legal opinions. They

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<sup>15</sup> For the Mamma Haïdara Library see Haïdara 2008 and the more recent Haïdara 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Görke/Hirschler 2011a, 14.

also bear witness to attendance at a reading session. Some studies have emphasised the function of the *ijāzāt* as a kind of symbolic and social capital, and their importance in analysing scholarly and social networks in Islamic societies.<sup>17</sup> Others have emphasised their role as sources for the biographical study of particular scholars, since apart from details on the dates and places of their studies — which may not be documented elsewhere — these notes may also contain information about their interests and the books they read and thus help provide a better view of their lives.

Stefan Leder, for example, has studied certificates of transmission in Damascus emphasising their usefulness, especially for studying the history of education and urban history. He shows that *samā'āt* notes not only testify to the authorised transmission of a fixed text, they also determine to a large extent the value of a manuscript and play a vital role in the question of its dissemination or disappearance. In particular, he underlines the important role of the practices of transmission, which often involve oral performance in the constitution of the text.<sup>18</sup> In another study, Jan Just Witkam highlights the human element in the transmission of texts to which these certificates bear witness. For a better understanding of the *ijāzāt*, it is also important to be aware of the individual and personal element in the transmission of Muslim scholarship.<sup>19</sup> Finally, Hirschler argues that although reading certificates have been studied for decades, their full implications for social and cultural history have only recently been understood. These certificates are one of the few pre-fifteenth century documentary sources that are available in significant numbers for Arabic-speaking lands. They provide historians of the region with a unique source for a variety of issues, including the history of textual reception, which is not available to the same extent for other world regions.<sup>20</sup>

## 2.2 Marks of ownership/ ownership statements (*tamlīkāt*, *tamallukāt*)

Marks of ownership and ownership statements (*tamlīkāt*, *tamallukāt*) in Arabic manuscripts have been the subject of several studies. They are usually to be found at the beginning of a manuscript, or at the end next to the colophon; some-

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<sup>17</sup> Görke/Hirschler 2011a, 16–17.

<sup>18</sup> Leder 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Witkam 1995.

<sup>20</sup> Hirschler 2012, 6.

times they provide a date. They have been used to reconstitute the history of manuscript collections and of their successive owners as well as to retrace and date the circulation and itinerary of a particular manuscript. If celebrated scholars leave signs or marks of their ownership on a manuscript, it can testify to the value assigned to that particular copy of the text.<sup>21</sup> Such marks can also serve as a possible source of identification of a given work. For example, Boris Liebrez shows that it is possible to reconstruct the contents of a library — that of the eighteenth/nineteenth century Syrian merchant Aḥmad al-Rabbat — from ownership statements. In addition, his notes sometimes mention the prices of some of his books, and thus constitute an important documentary source for information on book prices, and therefore on the book market. Al-Rabbat's manuscripts are also filled with readers' notes, dating from his lifetime but not in his hand, which shows that the collection was publicly accessible beyond his circle of personal friends. Furthermore, the marginalia show that his collection was also shaped by requests of books from friends.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.3 Study or reading records and collation notes (*muṭāla'āt* and *muqābalat*)

Study or reading records (*muṭāla'āt*) are closely related to ownership notes. They are often very short statements to the effect that a given person read a certain book or a part thereof. The study-notes often begin with the words *ṭāla'a*, *ṭāla'a fī*, and *naẓara fī*.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, collation notes (*muqābalat*, *balāghāt*) denote the establishment of the correct transmission of the copied text, either by the scribe comparing the copy with the model, or by the student reciting the text back to the author or teacher. Collation with the model by a scribe was one of the primary ways of ensuring an authoritative transmission of texts. The aural collation of a text was usually done over the course of a number of sessions and the marginal notes mark both where the collation was interrupted (*balāghāt*, *tablighāt*) but also the mode of the collation i.e. *samā'an* (by audition) or *qirā'atan* (by reading, recitation).<sup>24</sup> These notes are useful for studies looking at intellectual history, book curriculum and learning practices of Arabic-literate societies.

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<sup>21</sup> Sayyid 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Liebrez 2011, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Gacek 1987.

<sup>24</sup> Gacek 2009, 65–69.

## 2.4 Autographs

Other marginalia connected to ownership notes and study and reading records are autographs, or notes containing a person's own signature or a short statement signed by him.<sup>25</sup> Autographs can be found on marginalia bearing personal signatures, including colophons, certificates of transmission, ownership statements, and study and reading records. Often, they are found on holographs, or manuscripts — in fair or draft versions — written by the authors themselves and not by scribes.<sup>26</sup> Holograph manuscripts were considered especially valuable for various reasons and were sought after by scholars. In this case marginalia—or their absence — can offer information about the status of a manuscript and its latter uses.<sup>27</sup> Witkam studied the autographs and holographs left by the famous Egyptian historian Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442), some of which were recopied by his secretary. The author himself took care to fix, increase and improve the copies, and then wrote his confirmation in the margin of the manuscript at the end of each text, as a colophon. Al-Maqrīzī's autographs — signed to confirm the authorised copy or holograph — were sometimes dated.<sup>28</sup> This type of marginalia shows that texts were transmitted orally, in other words, they were read out loud by scholars authorised to do so, and who in turn transmitted the authorisation, thereby guaranteeing the authenticity of the texts. The names listed on the margins around a text evoke the presence of scholars grouped around the manuscripts to see and touch them, to read them as well as to listen to them.<sup>29</sup>

## 2.5 Other notes: independent textual fragments

Several studies concentrate on notes that have no direct relation to the main text of the manuscript. Among these, notes found in the margins of Quranic manuscripts are informative. Qurans were often highly valued and protected manuscripts, and thus their notes are likely to be preserved. A common practice was that of recording births and deaths of family members on the flyleaves or margins of some copies of the Quran; other notes record extraordinary natural phenomena.<sup>30</sup> Just like other notations, these marginalia, besides proving highly useful in dating a manuscript,

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<sup>25</sup> Gacek 2009, 14–16.

<sup>26</sup> Gacek 2009.

<sup>27</sup> Sublet 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Witkam 1994.

<sup>29</sup> Sublet 2001.

<sup>30</sup> Déroche et al. 2000, 335.

may also provide clues into the familial or social context of a particular period. One study of marginalia in Qurans from a Dāghistān collection shows that the marginal notes contain official records such as trade deals concerning allotments, which points to the use of Quranic manuscripts also as *qāḍī* registration books. H. Omarov argued that they acted as guarantors and provided infallibility and safety of property deals made under Sharia.<sup>31</sup> Other Quranic manuscripts from the region serve as family records giving a variety of names and dates. They are notary records of varied registration acts, land rentals, purchases and sales of land and houses and property inheritance as well as lists of bridal dowries and registers of credit operations. They are often found on broad margins, at an angle to the main text; the earliest date to 1138/1726–27.<sup>32</sup> The richness of the content of marginalia found in Quranic manuscripts highlights the inherent value of marginalia.

Claus-Peter Haase shows how the study of inconspicuous and seemingly unimportant marginalia can enhance our knowledge of social life in Islamic societies. A nineteenth century *qāḍī* in Anatolia used a manuscript as a personal notebook, writing letters and commentaries in the margins and other blank spaces. Not only do his notes give an interesting view into his life, they also indicate his social links, interests and beliefs, providing a unique perspective on Ottoman provincial life.<sup>33</sup> Other studies highlight the role of marginalia for what they reveal of the strategies and practices of manuscript production. For example, Gacek brings to light the presence of invocations or magical formulae such as *kabikaj* or *budūḥ* on the margins of manuscripts as a protection against being eaten by insects or to safeguard them from the elements.<sup>34</sup>

The studies mentioned above provide an overview of the type of marginalia prevalent in the Arabic manuscript tradition. They include transmission certificates and licences, ownership statements and marks, reading, audition and collation notes, and finally independent textual fragments. In addition, they illustrate the large scope of thematic fields for which manuscript notes can be used — including social history, procedures of teaching and transmission of knowledge, the social role of manuscripts, and biographical and archival studies.

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<sup>31</sup> Omarov 2004.

<sup>32</sup> Rezvan 2002.

<sup>33</sup> Haase 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Gacek 1986.

## 2.6 Marginalia in West African manuscripts

In contrast, studies devoted only to marginalia found in West African Arabic manuscripts are rare, with the notable exception of those marginalia containing ‘*ajamī* glosses.<sup>35</sup> However, in a recent volume on manuscript culture in the trans-Saharan region edited by Graziano Krätli and Ghislaine Lydon,<sup>36</sup> marginalia appear in some articles which emphasise the nature of manuscripts as objects of production, circulation and consumption. For example, Murray Last remarks that in Northern Nigeria most manuscripts that survive have no personal marginal notes made by readers, except for occasional definitions of words on the margin in ‘*ajamī* or Arabic, especially in poetry works.<sup>37</sup> He wonders, ‘Was there a convention that texts be kept “clean” (especially if they were borrowed from colleagues or one’s teachers); or did copyists ignore marginal addenda and re-copy only the main body of the text? . . . Were books in northern Nigeria usually too scarce — or too precious, too authoritative — to “personalise” with marginalia? Were readers reluctant ever to “quarrel” with the book’s author?’ Whatever the case, it does seem that in Sokoto books were not “used” by readers as they were, say, in Timbuktu where marginal addenda in works of local history were more common.<sup>38</sup>

Despite this en passant mention of marginalia in relation to Timbuktu, there are not many concrete studies that illustrate that claim. Murray Last here refers to John Hunwick’s work, and indeed, in a broad, non-specialist overview of the manuscript tradition of the region the latter states: ‘Scholars from Timbuktu often wrote in the margins of manuscripts. These notes are generally of two types: comments relating to the original text or previous annotations; and comments which are totally divorced from the text, where the writer used the margins to record external events, presumably simply for lack of paper . . . other times these notes provide us with some of the most important historic information from the region.’<sup>39</sup> Throughout his scholarship which spans over forty-years, Hunwick made frequent use of marginalia for his studies, although he did not analyse marginalia in themselves systematically. Nevertheless, he wrote an article on two glosses

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<sup>35</sup> For examples of Kanuri and Fulfulde glosses see respectively Bondarev 2006 and Robinson 1982.

<sup>36</sup> Krätli/Lydon 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Last 2011.

<sup>38</sup> Last 2011, 192–193.

<sup>39</sup> Hunwick/Boye 2008, 94.

and a couple of articles on colophons<sup>40</sup> — that though not strictly marginalia, incorporate characteristics of the latter — in addition to presenting and translating, in a brief contribution, a now-famous marginal note from the Fondo Kati collection.<sup>41</sup>

At this point, the question of the Fondo Kati, another manuscript collection in Timbuktu that has now become synonymous with marginalia,<sup>42</sup> becomes relevant. In fact, I undertook the analysis that follows for comparative purposes in the context of a larger project on the Fondo Kati and the peculiar marginalia contained in its manuscripts. In the absence of comprehensive studies of marginalia in West African manuscripts,<sup>43</sup> I needed some comparative guidelines to analyse the marginalia from the Fondo Kati, so I selected manuscripts from a collection that resembles the Kati collection to some extent. Thus, after establishing the broader context of marginalia in the Arabic manuscript tradition, the analysis in the following section — the central contribution of this article — offers a basis on which to compare and evaluate the marginalia of the West African region. Some possible comparative questions to keep in mind include: Did regional traditions develop that led to the use of specific genres of notes, to local forms of how to write these notes, and to functions of notes that we would not find in other regions?

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**40** These articles were originally published in the journal *Fontes Historiae Africanae*, *Bulletin of Information* in different years, but republished together later in *Sudanic Africa* (13): O'Fahey/Hunswick/Lange 2002, Hunswick 2002a, and Hunswick 2002b.

**41** Hunswick 2001.

**42** On the Fondo Kati see Molins Llitas 2013a, 2015a, and 2015b.

**43** However, I draw from some interesting unpublished codicology-oriented works by the traditional Timbuktu scholar Mahmoud Mohammed Dédéou dit Hamou entitled *al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-'arabiya wa al-makṭūba bi al-ḥarf al-'arabī fī manṭiqat al-sāḥil al-ifrīqī* and *al-Khaṭṭ fī Timbuktu* (copies provided by the author). In addition, Saadou Traoré, a Malian researcher previously affiliated to the IHERI-AB, also completed a codicological *Mémoire* on the manuscripts of Timbuktu, to my knowledge the first of its kind, under the supervision of François Déroche at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris (Traoré 2011).

### 3 The marginalia from the Mamma Haïdara collection

The Mamma Haïdara Library was the first private family library established in Timbuktu in 1999, and also the first to make the move towards opening its collection to selected outsiders, to “go public” at a certain level.<sup>44</sup> It is currently directed by Abdel Kader Haïdara, son of Mamma Haïdara (c. 1895–1981), a traditional scholar and bibliophile who founded and reorganised the existing library, adding many volumes collected during his travels as well as others copied in his own hand. According to the family, the core of the historical collection dates from the sixteenth century and originated in the village of Bamba, about two hundred kilometres east of Timbuktu, with Muḥammad al-Mawlūd, a direct ancestor of the current owners.<sup>45</sup> The collection is composed of about 9,000 manuscripts and 1,200 recently acquired modern Arabic printed books; it was housed in a large library building in Timbuktu funded by the American Andrew Mellon and Ford Foundations and the Juma al-Majid Heritage and Culture Centre in Dubai, among others.<sup>46</sup> In the early 2000s, the al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation published a catalogue of the collection in four volumes, which, as with similar catalogues of West African libraries, contains no references to marginalia in the manuscripts.<sup>47</sup> During the political crisis in Northern Mali in 2012/13, the Mamma Haïdara collection was transported to Bamako — along with a couple of dozen other libraries — and is currently housed in the capital where it is being reorganised, and where measures are being taken for its conservation, digitisation and improved cataloguing.<sup>48</sup> Thus, it is perhaps the largest, most organised, and best-funded private family manuscript collection from Timbuktu.

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<sup>44</sup> Haïdara 2011.

<sup>45</sup> Haïdara 2011, 242–243

<sup>46</sup> Haïdara 2011, 246–247. The numbers reported here reflect Haïdara’s own count in 2011; however since then, the numbers seem to have increased dramatically, according to new unpublished handlists. However, until these new numbers are confirmed, I quote the last published information.

<sup>47</sup> Haïdara/Sayyid 2000–03. The Grand Library of the *Āyatu’Llāh al-‘Uẓmā* al-Ma’rashī al-Najafī in Iran, also published a more recent volume of the catalogues of the Mamma Haïdara Library (Haïdara/Moujani 2011).

<sup>48</sup> These efforts, under the auspices of the NGO SAVAMA-DCI (Sauvegarde et Valorisation des Manuscrits pour la Défense de la Culture Islamique) are being funded by a host of international donors including the German Federal Foreign Office and the Gerda Henkel Foundation, and co-ordinated under the project ‘Safeguarding the manuscripts of Timbuktu’ run and directed by the



The collection of West African marginalia presented in this section was taken from a sample of just over one hundred manuscripts from the Mamma Haïdara Library and reflects a range of dates, provenances and themes. The sample of manuscripts was selected from available digitised manuscripts in the Tombouctou Manuscripts Project files,<sup>49</sup> and thus it is neither a comprehensive nor a fully representative sample of manuscripts from the wider collection, or region. However, this survey of the marginalia offers a preliminary appraisal of the different marginalia contained in this collection, many of which are likely to be found in other collections throughout the region. Of the one hundred manuscripts surveyed, about thirty-nine of them, or approximately two fifths, contain marginalia of some kind.

A preliminary classification of Timbuktu marginalia:<sup>50</sup>

### 3.1 Addenda to the text

A significant number of the marginalia in these manuscripts are addenda to the text written in many cases by the scribe (in the same hand), or by one or more readers (different hands), by adding the section of a sentence which has been left out, or by inserting the omitted words. From these notes, one can assess the quality and experience, or lack thereof, of the copyist or scribe. Some of these addenda are marked by different symbols showing the location of the addendum, or its nature, although more inexperienced hands do not necessarily add these symbols. For example, (Fig. 1) an addendum may be indicated in the main text by a *signe-de-renvoi* in the form of a curved stroke and then completed in the margins. In this case, the addendum is located in the left margin and ends with the term *ṣahḥa*, to indicate the text is now correct.

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Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC) at the University of Hamburg. See website for updated details: [http://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/timbuktu/index\\_e.html](http://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/timbuktu/index_e.html)

<sup>49</sup> The Tombouctou Manuscripts Project entered into an agreement with the Mamma Haïdara Library for the digitisation of a selection of about one-hundred manuscripts in January 2004 for research purposes. In addition, from 2007, we collaborated with Aluka, an international initiative formed to build an online digital library of scholarly resources from and about Africa (which became part of JSTOR in 2008) on the digitisation of another three-hundred manuscripts from the SAVAMA-DCI libraries. The images in this section are all courtesy of the Mamma Haïdara Library.

<sup>50</sup> This survey of the marginalia was conducted with the assistance of Mahmoud Mohammed Dédéou *dit* Hamou, traditional Islamic scholar and manuscript expert from Timbuktu. His insights and extensive knowledge of the subject is hereby gratefully acknowledged.

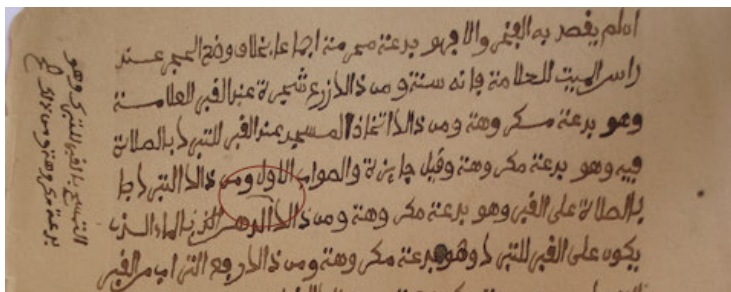


Fig. 1: *Bayān al-bida' al-shayṭāniyya* by 'Uthmān b. Fodiye (d. 1817), MMHT 188, fol. 6r.

Figure 2 provides an additional example of a term added to the marginal note to indicate that the text with the addenda is now correct. Here, the note ends with *ṣaḥḥa wa-raj'a* indicating that it was corrected and checked with a source. In another instance, at the end of the note the scribe repeats the term *ṣaḥḥa* (correct) three times for emphasis.

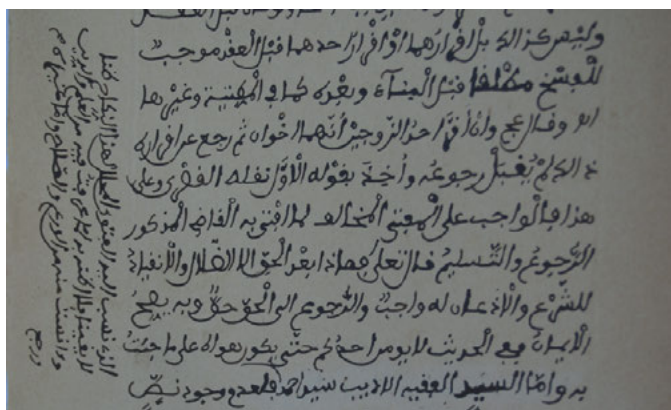


Fig. 2: *Naṣarā al-ḥaqq* by Aḥmad Bābā b. Abī 'l 'Abbās (b. c. 1860), MMHT 354, fol. 2r.

Figure 3 provides another example of a simple *signe-de-renvoi*, a curved stroke above and between words indicating the location of the addendum. In this instance, we can deduce that the scribe started the addition on the lower margin, but erased it and continued on the left margin, possibly because the lower margin is preferably left blank, as that is where a person holds a manuscript to read it.

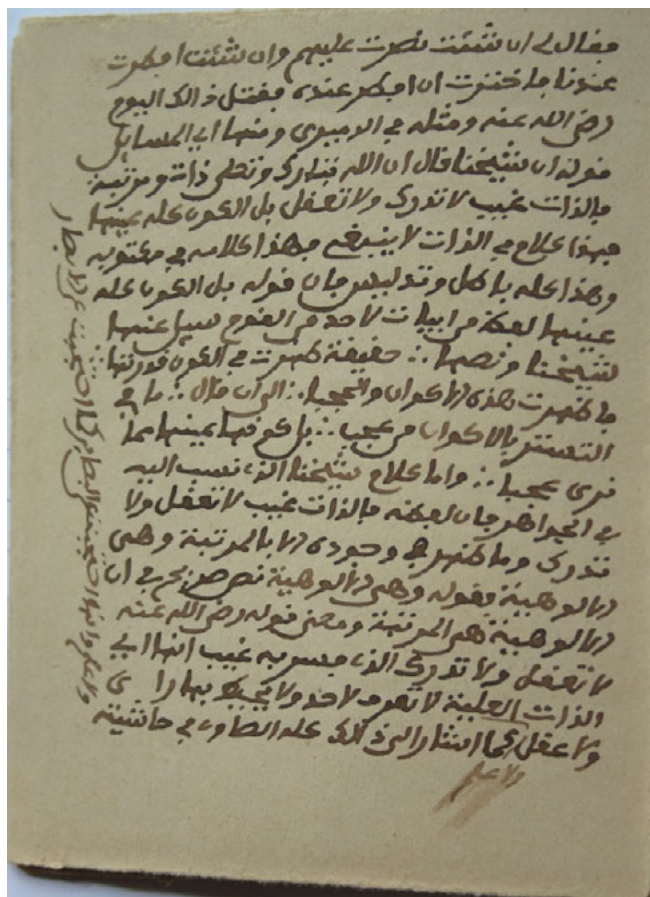


Fig. 3: *Jawāb ‘ulamā’ Tinbuktū* by Muḥammad b. ‘Ābidīn (late nineteenth c.), MMHT 191, fol. 17r.

Often, we see that confusion in the copying occurs when a word is repeated in the text, causing the scribe to skip the sentence or words immediately following which ended with the repeated word.

### 3.2 Corrections to the text

Another frequently observed source of marginalia, closely related to the former in form, is corrections to the text, known as *bayān*. This word is often indicated by an elongated letter *bā’* found above the correction in the margin (Figs 4, 6). The nature of the corrections is manifold: it involves grammar, spelling, or cacography (scribal

errors which can occur when a word is written illegibly or smudged)<sup>51</sup>, or even the complete replacement of a passage or sentence. The corrected word or sentence in the main text is indicated by a variety of symbols and *signes-de-renvoi*, such as crosses (Fig. 4), small circles (Fig. 5), a reversed *mīm* (Fig. 6), or a simple stroke (Figs 6, 7) on or above the words to be deleted in order to conceal them while at the same time preventing the manuscript from looking ugly or untidy.

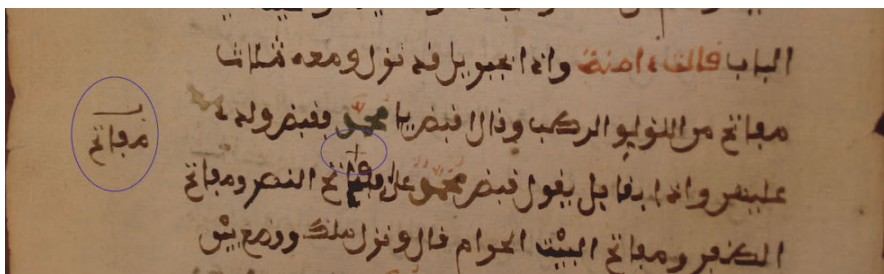


Fig. 4: *al-Shamā'il al-muḥammadiyya*, MMHT 52, fol. 17r.

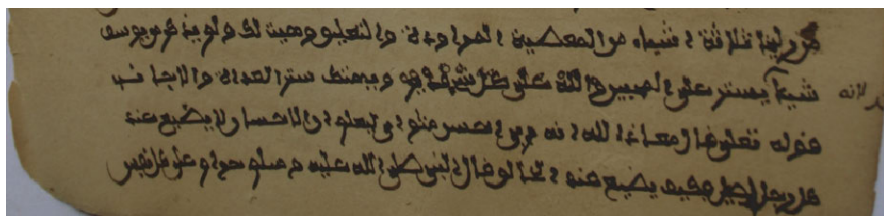


Fig. 5: *al-Ẓuhur al-'anyaq* by Ghālīb 'Abd al-Salām al-Qayrawānī, MMHT 3781, fol. 23r.

Figure 6 demonstrates that the same scribe working on one manuscript may not necessarily be consistent in the use of these symbols: in the first instance, the scribe uses reversed *mīm* to indicate the incorrect word, while in the second example in the same folio, the mistaken word is simply crossed with a stroke.

<sup>51</sup> Gacek 2009, 40.

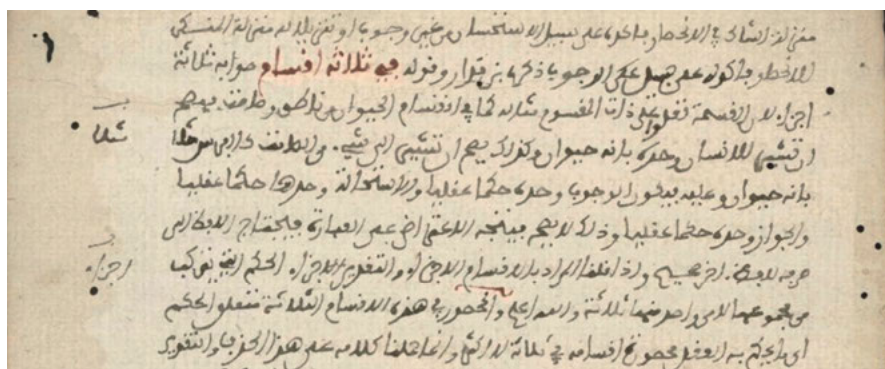


Fig. 6: *Bughyat al-ṭālibīn* by Muḥammad al-Miṣrī, MMHT 3077, fol. 12r.

Copyists or scribes were not the only ones to use these methods, terms and symbols when correcting a manuscript. Fig. 7 is an example of a holograph, or draft by the author, where he is correcting the text, adding and removing sections. Note the method of cancelation used in the last few lines of the text: a line with a slightly curved end (like an inverted, un-pointed *bāʾ*) through the main text.<sup>52</sup>

Another common symbol used when correcting the text is the letter *ṭā* meaning *ṭurra*; the term is often translated as ‘gloss’, but in West Africa is also used to define or clarify the text. In Fig. 8, the incorrect Quranic verse is indicated by the symbol *ṭā* above the length of the verse, while the correction is given in the right margin.

52 See Gacek 2009, 48.



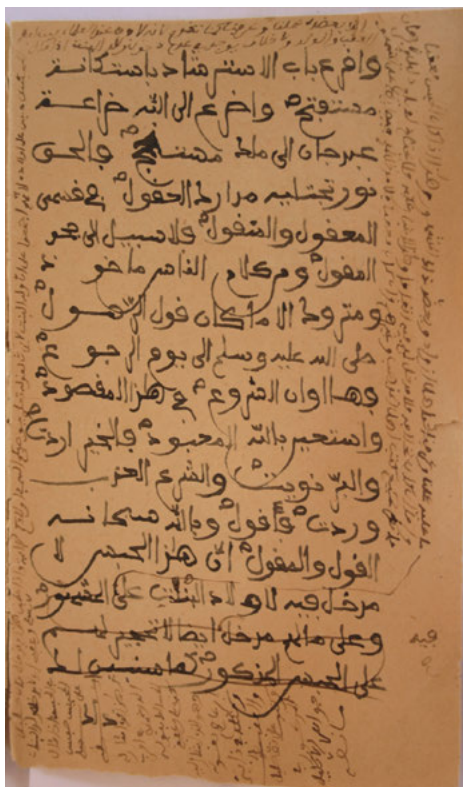


Fig. 7: *Jawāb al-masā'il* by Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd b. al-Shaykh (d. 1973), MMHT 641, fol. 1v.

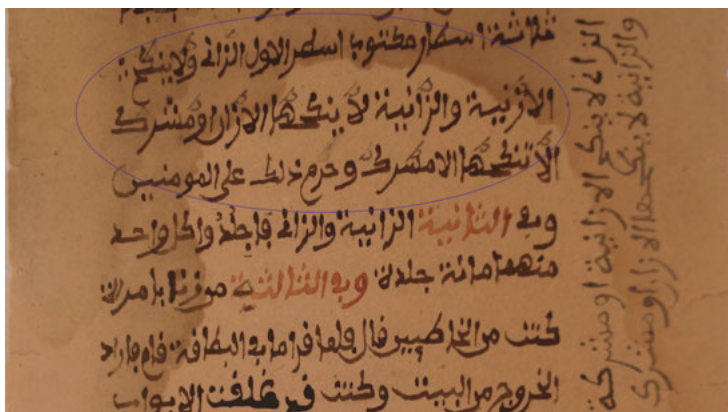


Fig. 8: *Qiṣṣat Sayyidinā Yūsuf*, MMHT 105, fol. 4v.

### 3.3 Clarification and commentary of text

Other notes with characteristics similar to addenda and corrections are marginalia used to clarify, expand and comment on the content of the text. These notes often provide additional information so that the reader of the text is able to understand its contents more fully or in greater depth. This category of marginalia includes definitions of words, both in Arabic (Fig. 10) and ‘*ajamī*’ (Fig. 11), as well as clarifications such as giving names of people mentioned in the text and who they were (Fig. 9).

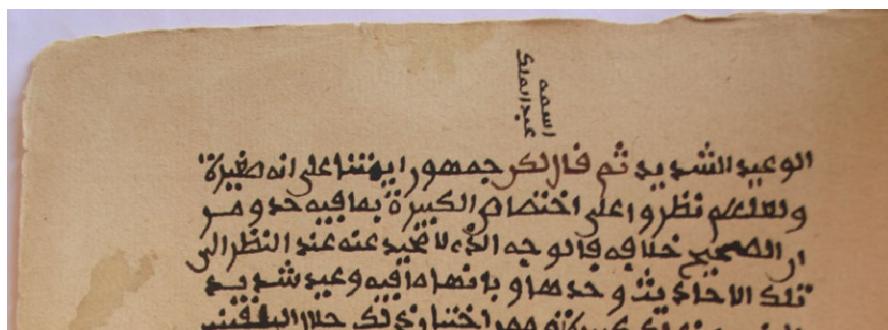


Fig. 9: *Taḥdhīr ahl al-īmān* by 'Uthmān b. Fodiye (d. 1817), MMHT 99, fol. 5r.

Figs 10 and 11 are good examples of marginalia as definitions of words. In the first case, the *signe-de-renvoi* of a reversed *mīm* is used to indicate the word to be translated and its definition is given on the top margin in Arabic, indicating the source (*al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* of al-Firūzābādī [d. 1414]). The second example also shows several words being defined, one in ‘*ajamī*’ (Songhay) in the bottom left margin.

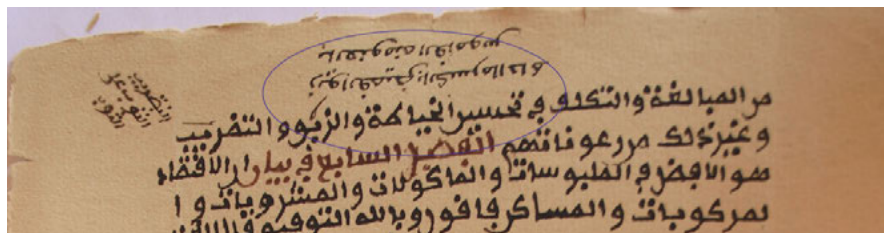


Fig. 10: *Taḥdhīr ahl al-īmān* by 'Uthmān b. Fodiye (d. 1817), MMHT 99, fol. 7r.

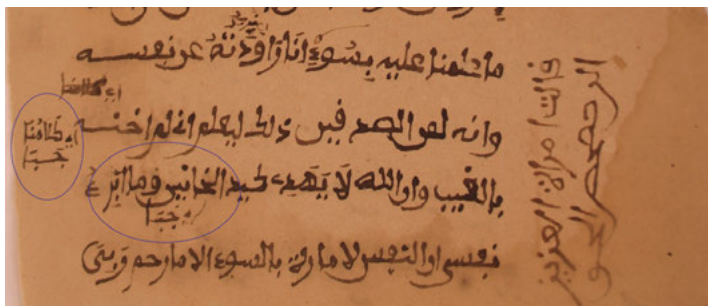


Fig. 11: *Qışşat Sayyidinā Yūsuf*, MMHT 105, fol. 12v.

Furthermore, this category also includes notes by the scribe or by different hands taken from other sources used to enrich the text, as well as commentaries (Figs 13 and 14), and *ṭurra* (gloss, scholia), indicated by the letter *ṭā'* (Fig. 12); as seen above, some of these categories overlap, for example, a *ṭurra* is also used to indicate a correction. The use of the latter term for “gloss” is a characteristic of Arabic manuscripts from the West, as in the East *ḥāshiya* is employed.<sup>53</sup> In Fig. 12, the scribe employs an elongated *ṭā'* as a superscript in the left margin to mark the *ṭurra*, which in this case is used to clarify and comment on an important point in the text.

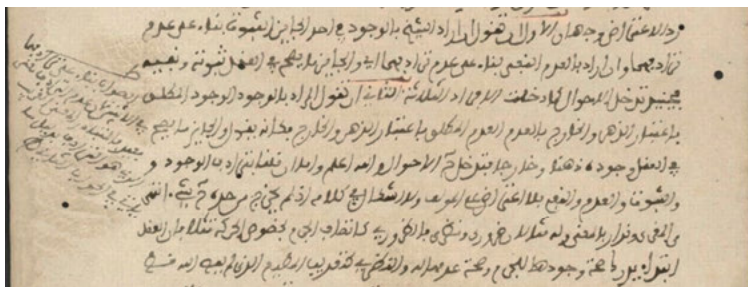


Fig. 12: *Bughyat al-ṭālibīn* by Muḥammad al-Miṣrī, MMHT 3077, fol. 14r.

Figures 13 and 14 are examples of type of commentary on poetry widespread in West Africa. This commentary on a poem is preceded by *اي*, called the *ḥarf tafsīrīn* (letter of commentary) in the left margin (Fig. 13). The poem in this manuscript is commented on in great detail in the subsequent folio (Fig. 14).

<sup>53</sup> Gacek 2009, 114–117, 315.



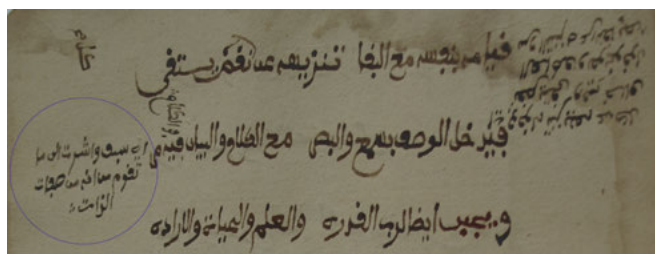


Fig. 13: *Mawāhib al-Jalīl fī sharḥ mukhtaṣar Khalīl b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ujhūrī al-Misrī* (d. 1655/6), MMHT 1204, fol. 3v.

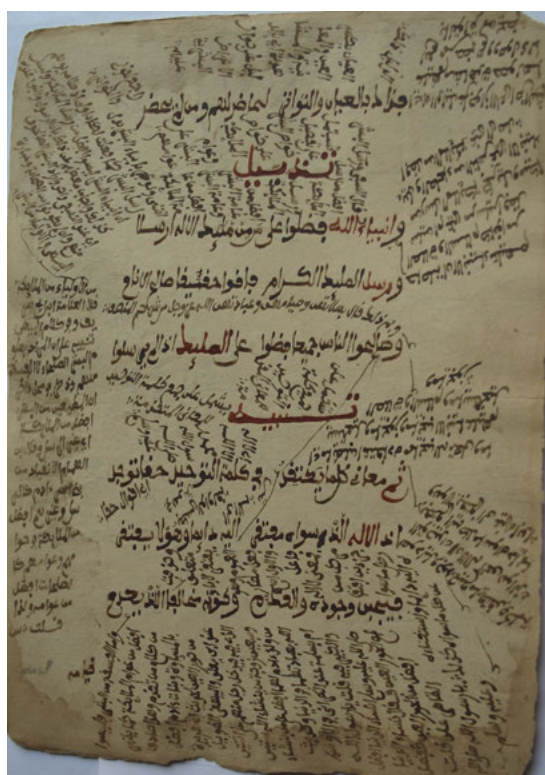


Fig. 14: *Mawāhib al-Jalīl fī sharḥ mukhtaṣar Khalīl b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ujhūrī al-Misrī* (d. 1655/6), MMHT 1204, fol. 4r.

### 3.4 Highlighting the text

These notes draw attention to certain passages or sentences in a text, and can be made either by the author, scribe or reader of the text. Words such as *qif* (Fig. 15) or *unzur* are used to emphasise the relevant section, and some are highlighted even further by the use of patterns (Fig. 16) or ornamented marginalia (Fig. 17) to draw attention to a particular section. In some cases the word *qif* is elongated and used as a frame (superscript and subscript) to enclose a comment or a summary of the relevant section (Fig. 15).

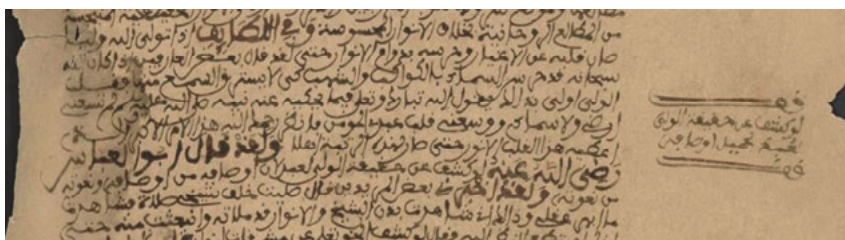


Fig. 15: *Jadhwat al-anwār* of Mukhtār al-Kuntī (d. 1811), MMHT unnumbered, fol. 8v.

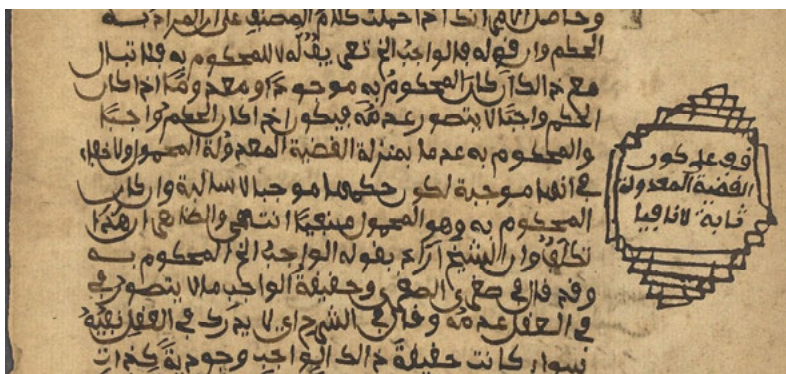


Fig. 16: *Qīṣṣat Dhī al-Qarnayn*, MMHT unnumbered, fol. 33r.

Figure 17 is an example of a manuscript in which the different characteristics of the *qif* point to the degrees of relevance and significance accorded to different passages by the reader or annotator. In this page, the ornamented *qif* is composed of an enclosed rounded section with patterns used to highlight importance and to add emphasis.

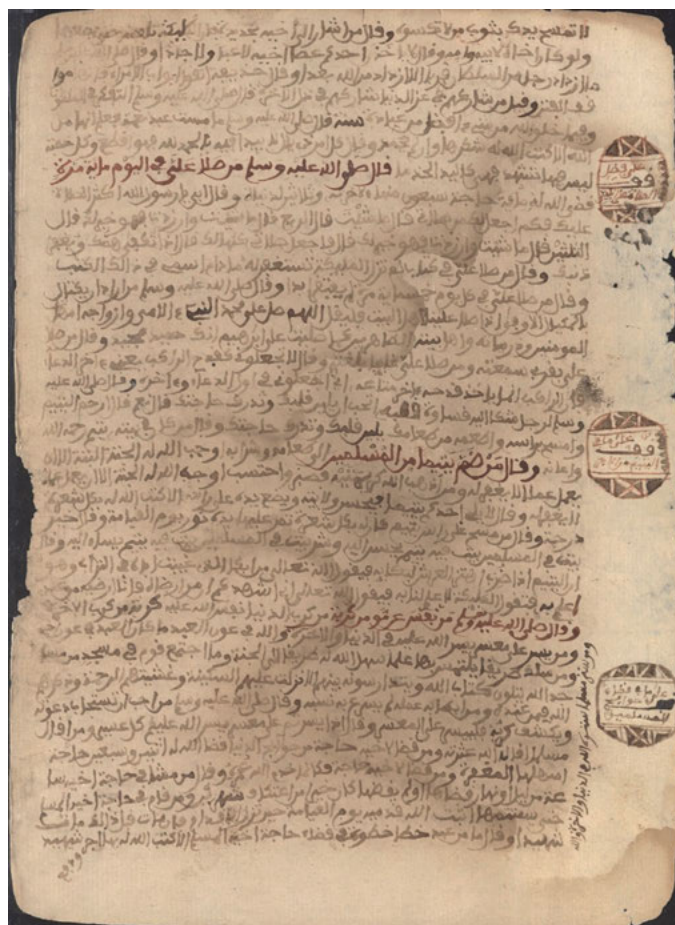


Fig. 17: *Kitāb al-baraka*, MMHT unnumbered, fol. 10r.

### 3.5 Independent textual fragments

Some notes have no direct relevance to the text. Such marginalia are often found in the first folio of a manuscript, which is often left blank, or in the last folio, or close to the colophon, although they can also be found elsewhere in the manuscript. Thematically, the topics of such marginalia vary significantly, and their physical characteristics also show great variation. Examples of independent textual fragments found on the “interior” of a manuscript — not on the first or last folios of a manu-

script — include: a reader's note evoking something he was reminded of when reading the text; in Figure 18, the main text is the story of Yūsuf, and the marginalia, written in the right margin perpendicular to the main text, comments on a bird of paradise. In another example (Fig. 19), the note located horizontally in the upper margin consists of a prayer for the protection of the manuscript.

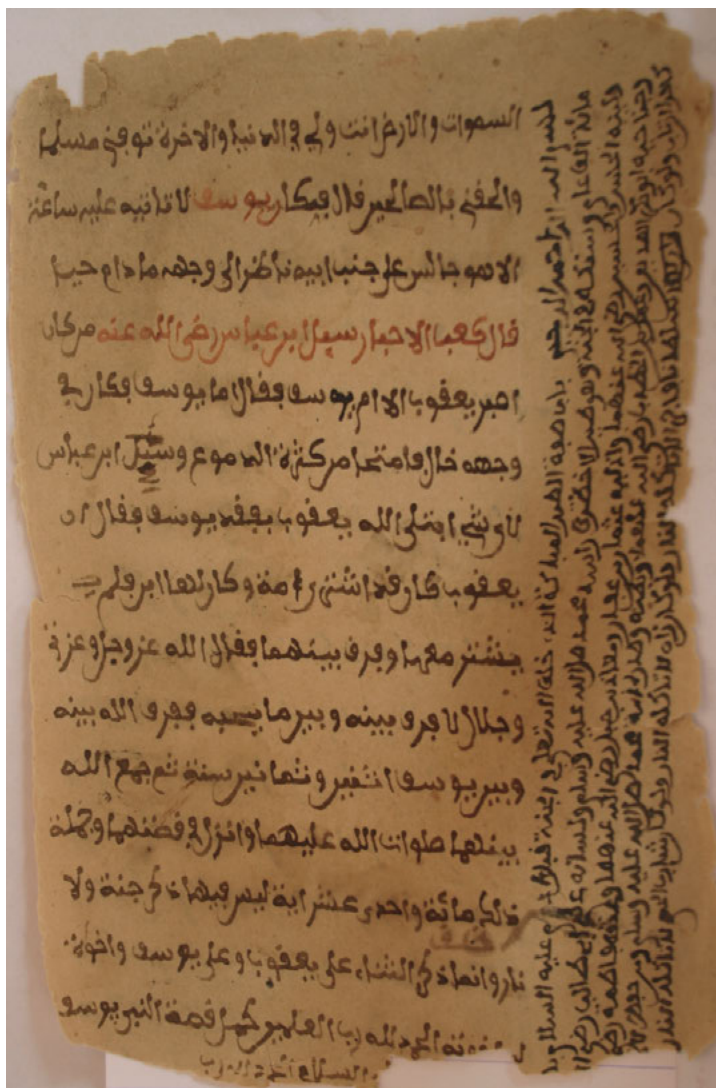


Fig. 18: *Qışşat Sayyidinā Yūsuf*, MMHT 105, fol. 35v.



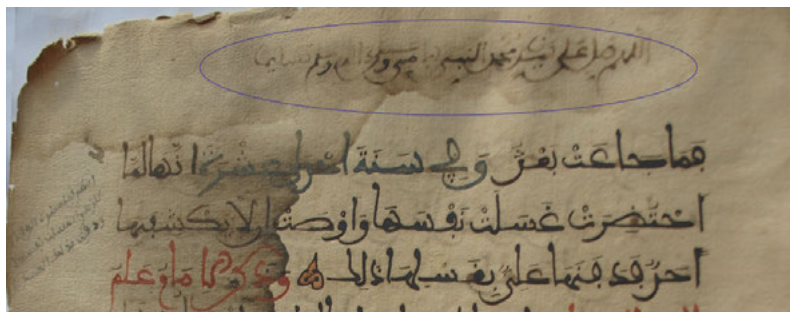


Fig. 19: *Talkhīṣ min kitāb* by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505), MMHT 579, fol. 5v.

However, the vast majority of independent textual fragments are located on the first and last folios of a manuscript. In the sample under review, the final folio was not as replete with notes as the first. Examples of such marginalia in the final folio include notes on the blank surface of the verso of the last folio of a manuscript offering an explanation of the *abjad* system for the Islamic West<sup>54</sup> (Fig. 20), or a note on the verso of the last folio next to the colophon, concerning the appropriate way for a man to behave with his wife so as not to become impotent (Fig. 21).

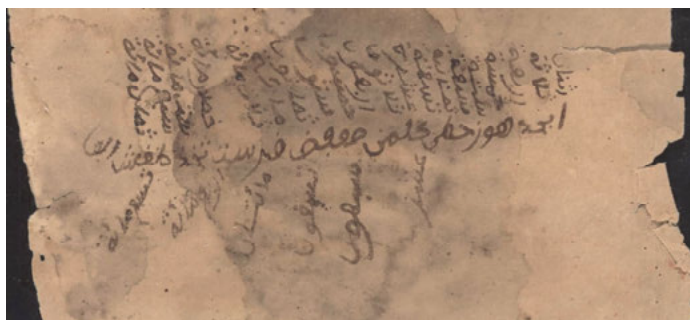


Fig. 20: *Kashf al-ghumma fī naf' al-umma* by Abū al-'Abbās al-Tuwātī (d. c. late eighteenth c.), MMHT 2248, fol. 48v.

<sup>54</sup> Numeral system in which the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet are assigned numerical values. The system, consisting of eight mnemotechnical terms, varies substantially in the Islamic East and West. See Gacek 2009, 11–13.

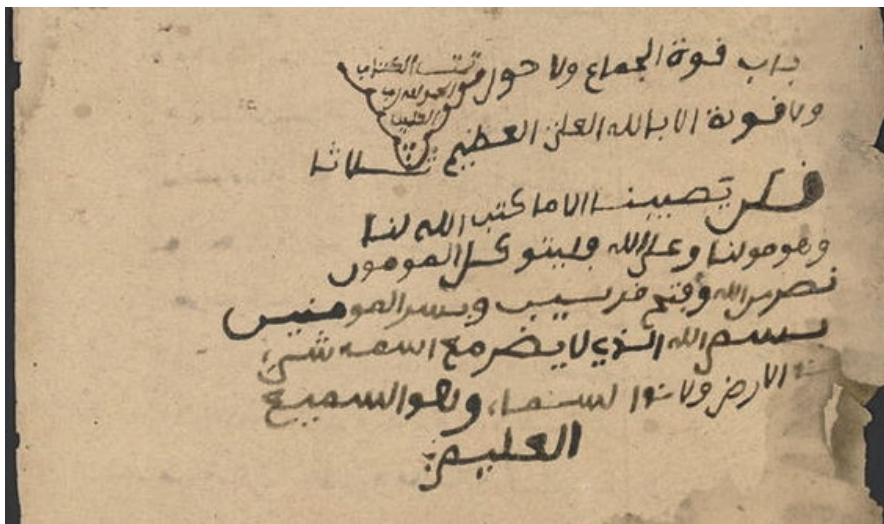


Fig. 21: *Naẓm sullam al-aṭfāl* by Aḥmad b. Būd b. Muḥammad al-Fulānī, MMHT 3415, fol. 4v.

Often, a manuscript may include independent textual fragments on both the first and final folio of the manuscript, as is the case of the manuscript illustrated in Fig. 21, showing the last folio. The recto of the first folio of this manuscript (Fig. 22) contains an array of different notes: in the top right corner written horizontally is a prayer to be recited before reading the manuscript; the upper half of the page contains a commented poem — marginalia within a marginalia so to speak—of Aḥmad Bābā with an explanation of the solar months and their calculations; the ‘poem of the ant’, still recited in Timbuktu today to ask for rain, is located on the bottom right of the page and written perpendicularly; finally, on the bottom left of the page and also written perpendicularly is a commentary on fathers and sons.

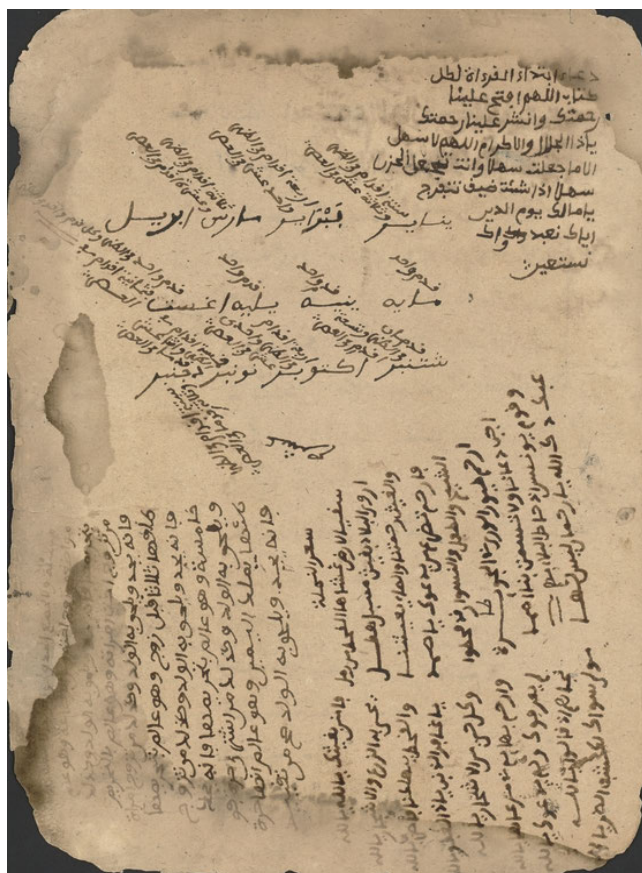
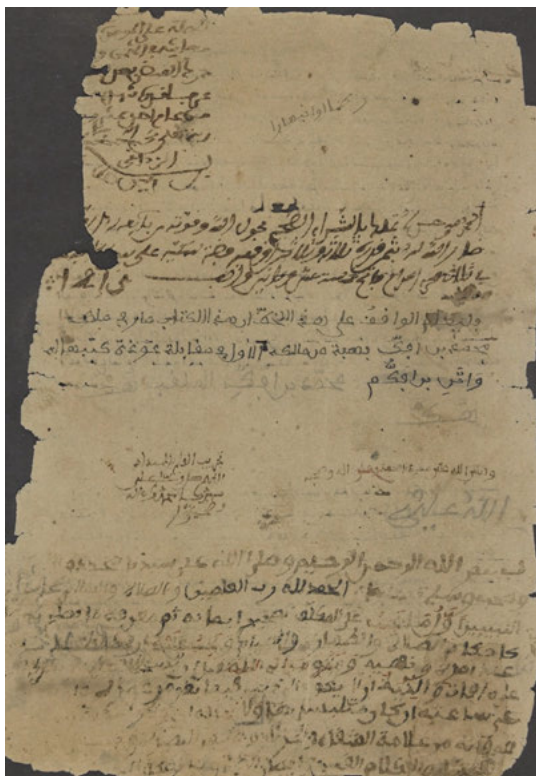


Fig. 22: *Naẓm sullam al-aṭfāl* by Aḥmad b. Būd b. Muḥammad al-Fulānī, MMHT 3415, fol. 1r.

Another example of the recto of the first folio of a manuscript containing a variety of notes is Fig. 23. In this manuscript, the page provides ample space for a range of marginalia clearly written by different hands: beginning at the top left corner and written horizontally, the first owner of the manuscript gives a date but no name; in the upper middle of the manuscript, written horizontally across the whole of the page are two other ownership notes by different hands denoting a change of ownership and the sale of the manuscript indicating its value (the last written in pen); in a small note in the lower half of the page on the left, the copyist simply tests his *qalam* (reed pen) and ink; finally, a completely separate text by Abd al-Raḥman al-Akhḍarī (d. 1575) is copied by a different hand in the bottom margin of this manuscript, namely on each folio beginning with the first.



**Fig. 23:** *Sharḥ ‘alā manẓūmat Abī ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-‘Arabī* of Ḥasan b. Yūsuf Ziyātī, MMHT unnumbered, fol. 1r.

### 3.6 Ownership statements

As illustrated by the last example in the category of independent textual fragments, ownership statements are a common type of marginalia found in West African manuscripts. Although usually categorised separately, they share many of the features of independent fragments, such as their frequent placement on the first (Fig. 23) or last folios of a manuscript next to the colophon (Figs 24 and 26). Ownership statements may consist of simple marks of possession just giving the name of the owner (Fig. 24) or a date of purchase (Fig. 23); they may offer more details, such as from whom the manuscript was purchased (Fig. 25) and at what price or in exchange for what (Fig. 23). When a manuscript changed ownership, the previous mark of possession was often erased (Fig. 24, on the left) or made unreadable (Fig. 25, on the left).





Fig. 24: *Wafāt al-Rasūl*, MMHT 164, fol. 8r.

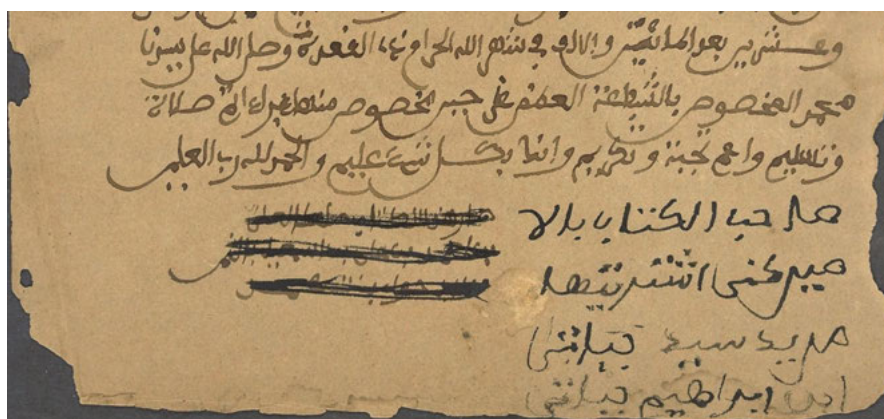


Fig. 25: *Sharḥ ‘alā ḥāshiya* by Ibn Zakūr Ibrāhīm al-Fulānī, MMHT unnumbered, fol. 22r.

Nevertheless, previous marks of possession were not always erased and in many cases we find multiple ownership notes following one another (Fig. 23), or located on either side of the colophon and written perpendicular or horizontal to the main text as illustrated by Figure 26.

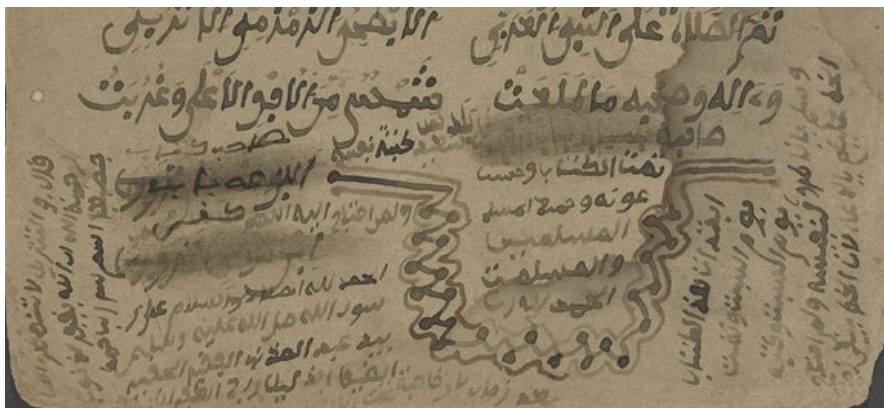


Fig. 26: *al-Durr al-manẓūm* by Yūsuf b. Saʿīd al-Qīlālī, MMHT 1059, fol. 3v.

### 3.7 Other notes

Although other types of notes, particularly those indicating the transmission or reading of a text — such as reading, audition, and collation notes and certificates and licences of transmission — are, as we saw previously, very common and widespread in Arabic manuscripts of other regions, in this survey only one such example was found. However, it is probable that these types of notes would emerge in a larger study of West African marginalia as some examples have been cited in other studies of manuscripts from the region.<sup>55</sup> In this sample, one example of this type of marginalia was a *samāʾāt* note found in the bottom margin of the manuscript and positioned at one hundred and eighty degrees to the main text (Fig. 27). The note reads: ‘I read this poem from my teacher who heard it from Aḥmad Bābā [d.1627].’

<sup>55</sup> See among others: Molins Lliteras 2015a, 2015b.

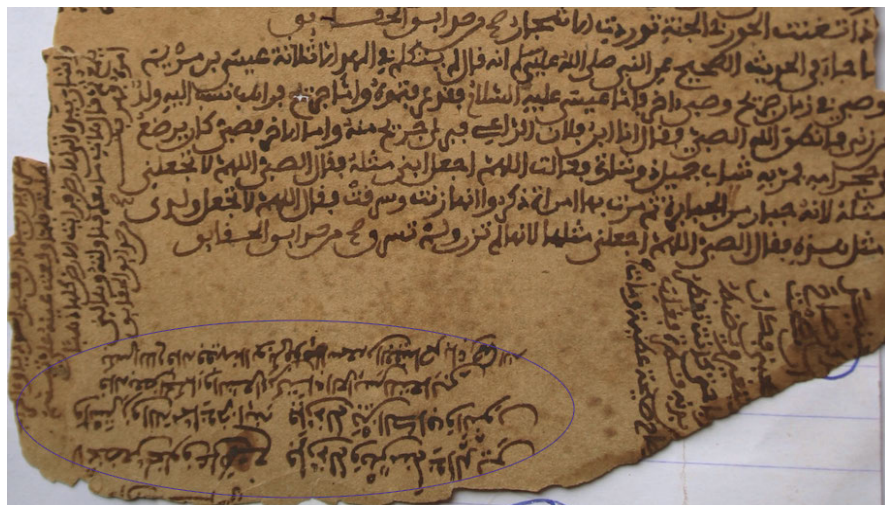


Fig. 27: *al-Mubīn fī mukhtaṣar* by Sayf al-Dīn 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Taḡlabī al-ʿĀmidī (d. 1233), MMHT 3689, fol. 1v.

## 4 Conclusion

This preliminary survey of marginalia on manuscripts from the Haïdara collection of Timbuktu, although limited and restricted in scope, points to some interesting characteristics of the notes found in manuscripts from the region. Marginalia related to the text, such as corrections, addenda, clarifications, commentaries and highlights are quite common and share certain characteristics. *Signes-de-renvoi*, such as a curved stroke and a reversed *mīm*, are common markers for a word to be corrected or for the placement of addenda, indicating the precise location of these notes in the main text. Symbols, frequently letters, groups of letters, or words indicate the nature of the notes in the margin — for example *ṣaḥḥa* is used to show that the text is now correct and an elongated *bā'* (*bayān*) above the note in the margin indicates the correction. Some of these symbols are found in Arabic manuscripts from other regions, while others seem peculiar to West African manuscripts. For example, the use of the letter *tā'* (*turra*) to designate both gloss and correction is characteristic of the Islamic West, as well as the frequent use of elongated letters or words — such as *qif* to highlight something in the main text — as superscripts or subscripts in the margin, above the corrected, added or highlighted text.

Independent textual fragments and ownership notes are also common marginalia found in manuscripts both from the Islamic East and West. They are often located in the first or last folio of a manuscript — ownership statements next to the colophon — although not exclusively. These notes display a wide range of topics, and are rarely marked by symbols, and previous marks of possession were often erased. The position and arrangement of the marginal notes in relation to the main text varies, although they are more often found on the inner and outer margins of a manuscript, possibly because the lower margin is preferably left blank, as that is where a person holds the manuscript to read it. The marginalia themselves are written in a variety of positions: they may be horizontal, perpendicular, slanted, diagonal or at one hundred and eighty degrees to the main text.

This preliminary study may serve as a useful comparative device with which to assess other marginalia from the region. In particular, the marginal notes from the Fondo Kati collection — which are often cited as examples from the region<sup>56</sup> — stand in marked contrast to many of the general characteristics of West African marginalia described in this article. The manuscripts from the Kati collection contain a range of marginalia by different people, scribes and readers; however, those purportedly written by the Kati family in particular stand out in a number of ways. In terms of content, the Kati family marginalia consist of either marks of possession or independent textual fragments, although there are also a few reading, audition and collation notes. Interestingly, my study of that collection did not find any correction, addition, or clarification notes by the Kati family members, or the use of symbols or *signes-de-renvoi*, which were the most common types of marginalia from the Haïdara collection.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, the ownership statements in the Kati collection share many characteristics with those of the Haïdara collection: they are also often found on the first folio of the manuscript, next to previous mark of possession or on the last folio, next to the colophon, or standing on their own. However, the majority of the Kati family marginalia I studied are independent textual fragments, signed and sometimes dated. These marginalia of the family in particular are easily distinguishable from other marginal notes found on the manuscripts on the basis of their layout and script.<sup>58</sup> The vast majority of the notes of the Kati family are written on the left or right margins of the manuscripts and oriented vertically and parallel to the main text. Occasionally, some notes are found in the top or bottom margins of a manuscript; in this

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<sup>56</sup> For example see Hunwick 2001, and Hunwick and Boye 2008.

<sup>57</sup> Molins Lliteras 2015b, Chapter 4.

<sup>58</sup> Details on the aspect of script lays outside of the scope of this paper; see Molins Lliteras 2015b, (Chapter 4) for details.

case, they are written horizontally and parallel to the text. This is in stark contrast to other marginalia from scribes or readers outside the Kati family, both in manuscripts of the Fondo Kati and the Haïdara collection, which are found in any of the margins and often slanted diagonally, or found at ninety or one hundred and eighty degree angles to the main text. In addition, unlike those analysed in this article, these marginal notes are not found on the first and last folios of the manuscripts, but instead are found in the inner folios of the manuscripts following one another from page to page.<sup>59</sup>

This preliminary comparison of marginalia found in two similar collections from Timbuktu demonstrates the necessity of additional, in-depth studies of this aspect of the local and regional manuscript tradition before further conclusions can be drawn. It is hoped that the newfound impetus of scholarship on the history of the book will set in motion a change of perspective that will lead to detailed studies on the marginalia of the region and to their inclusion in source materials. This survey is a first small step in that direction, and will have borne fruit if it whets the appetite of scholars to take a serious look at the possibilities unlocked by such studies.

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### Section 3: **Writing Practices and Authorship around the Continents**



Adrien Delmas

# Writing in Africa: The *Kilwa Chronicle* and other Sixteenth-Century Portuguese Testimonies

**Abstract:** Based on the study of the encounter between the Portuguese and the Swahili in the sixteenth century, and on the analysis of the *Kilwa Chronicle* that resulted from it, this chapter questions the notion of ‘textual contact’. Rediscovering the way in which a text presenting the five hundred years genealogy of the kings of Kilwa could have been printed in Portuguese in João de Barros’s *Decades* in Lisbon, in 1552, is not a simple matter. While the why of the chronicle, for which there are several political reasons arising from Kilwa’s occupation in 1505, is obvious, the how of the chronicle is much less so. Through a systematic study of the two written versions of the text at our disposal, the *Crónica* and the *Kitāb*, we will show that the existence of an original manuscript which, as is generally presumed, would have been found by the Portuguese on their arrival and would have travelled up to the mouth of the Tagus, raises strong doubts. These doubts could be answered more convincingly through an alternative hypothesis, according to which the chronicle was ‘co-written’ in the sixteenth century, as a result of the encounter. In addition to the study of the conditions under which the *Kilwa Chronicle* was circulated in the sixteenth century, this article would like to illustrate the fact that it is impossible to express a view on the circulation of genres – and in this case of historiographic genres transiting between the Muslim world and Europe on the eve of its maritime expansion – independently of the circulation of texts embodying these genres.

## 1 Hiding texts

As is well known, Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope at the end of 1497 and reached Mozambique a few weeks later, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March 1498. Almost one century later, da Gama’s famous biographer, Luís de Camões, related the encounter on the Mozambican coast in his thirty-thousand-verse epic poem on the European intrusion in the Indian Ocean, *Os Lusíadas*:

[The Sultan of Mozambique] repeats [to the Portuguese] that he wishes to see the books containing their Law, Precept or Faith, to see whether they are in keeping with his own, and

whether these men are Christians, as he believes they are. [Vasco da Gama replied as follows:] I did not take with me the books of this powerful and infinite Man-God, as you request, for it is not necessary to carry on paper what must always be in the soul.<sup>1</sup>

According to the poet, the discussions between Vasco da Gama and the inhabitants of South-East Africa took place in Arabic, and rapidly turned to the issue of writing and, more specifically, the Scriptures. Mutual recognition by respectively presenting sacred texts should not come as a surprise. For the Portuguese, the idea was to find Christian allies in their endeavour to circumvent Islam, and this ceremonial exchange was repeated along the East African coast, in Mombasa and Malindi, as well as on the way back in Mogadiscio and Kilwa, but also in other places in Africa and the Indian Ocean.<sup>2</sup> For the Africans, the need to identify newcomers was obvious, and while they were hoping to size up their strength by the sound of their cannons, it was through their writings that they intended to find out their intentions. But the Portuguese hastened to hide the Bible. Similarly, they celebrated Mass on a small neighbouring island, hidden from view, which again made their hosts suspicious. Nevertheless, the fact remains that before any dissimulation or recognition could take place as far as religions were concerned, men of letters were easily recognised, and the response given by da Gama, as theological as it might have sounded, did not convince anyone.

Above all, this anecdote illustrates the importance taken on by writing during this encounter between Europe and East Africa, the first of many of its kind around the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese were immediately involved in a scriptural relationship with their interlocutors. Within this relationship, there was no imposition, diffusionism or appropriation. On the contrary, with this unfortunate attempt at dissimulating their religion that day, the Europeans who had just disembarked from their caravels, were the 'illiterate' ones. Writing was even moving in the opposite direction: da Gama also reported seeing books where they landed, most likely Qurans.<sup>3</sup> As such, this anecdote from South-East Africa appears as the perfect refutation of the generally admitted view that an encounter took place at the dawn of our modernity, between a written European culture and an oral African culture, between a literate continent and an illiterate one. Yet, is an additional refutation really necessary? The time has passed for the refutation of the dominant paradigm that has for too long contrasted a written culture with an oral one, when Europe met Africa at a time when navigation expanded to oceans. The topos of the refutation, still omnipresent in the literature about writing in Africa,

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1 Camões 2013, 28–29. See Subrahmanyam 1997, 113.

2 Subrahmanyam 1997, 117.

3 Subrahmanyam 1997, 115.

goes hand in hand with the myth of African orality, almost as a continuity or extension of it. Everything happens as if each ancient or contemporary expression of written culture in Africa, characterised by exceptionalism, seemed sufficient to satisfy the scientific community.<sup>4</sup> If it must be refuted, it is because the myth is still very much alive.<sup>5</sup>

The repetition of refutations is no longer appropriate for the study of the different 'scriptural situations' across the continent, in all their singularities and complexities; in fact, it is even counter-productive. Opening the concept of writing to realities other than the alphabet,<sup>6</sup> understanding better the consequences of literacy from an anthropological point of view<sup>7</sup> or studying the ways European written culture was appropriated<sup>8</sup>, all represent significant advances of the field during the last few years. But what about the accumulation of our knowledge on written cultures in sub-Saharan Africa before the arrival of the Europeans? Rather than being satisfied with the slightest counter-example, before thinking about new theoretical detours, it seems urgent today that we start accumulating testimonies of a poorly documented reality – i.e. the situation of written culture in Africa at the beginning of the first modernity.

## 2 Paintings and other scripts

To this end, as early as the first half of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese periphrasies around the African continent, aimed at reaching the Indies directly, as tangential and external to African societies as they were,<sup>9</sup> offer many invaluable insights. In fact, following up on Portuguese caravels in their circumnavigations makes it possible, on the one hand, to illustrate up to a certain point the multiplicity of scriptural situations in fifteenth-century Africa and, on the other, to read the terms of ongoing debates on writing in Africa. In their rock painting records from Congo in the sixteenth century, the issue of autochthonous writing, which still fills many a page on writing in Africa,<sup>10</sup> was raised straight away.

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4 The most striking example of this has certainly been Timbuktu, truly symbolic of the never-ending discovery and rediscovery of writing in Africa. See Triaud 2009.

5 See Ficquet/Mbodj-Pouye 2009.

6 Derrida 1967.

7 This issue has been studied extensively by Jack Goody. Goody 1978, 1994, 2007.

8 See Madeira Santos/Tavares 2002.

9 See Hirsch/Potin 2009.

10 See Le Quellec 2012.

Father Diego del Santissimo Sacramento, a Carmelite missionary who stayed in Mbanza Kongo from 1584 to 1587, mentions rock art in his history. By no means does he seem ready to ascribe this art to African origin:

Since this kingdom's conversion to Christianity, we suppose (I was told this with certainty) that an Apostle came through here during the time of evangelisation. We think it was Saint Thomas who left texts on a stone and no one knew how to translate them because they were traditionally written in Hebrew.<sup>11</sup>

A few decades before such a significant view, the issue of autochthonous African writing was explicitly raised by Leo Africanus, when he mentioned in his *Description of Africa* in 1550 that 'African writer Ibnu Rachich dealt with this question at length in his chronicle, i.e. whether or not Africans had their own writing, and concluded that they had it by advancing that whoever thinks the contrary must also deny that Africans had their own language.'<sup>12</sup> While this argument, which deliberately confuses language and writing, can appear unusual, the fact remains that such a concern had already been raised as early as the end of the fifteenth century. This was also the case for the concern for orality, defined from the outset in contrast with writing. Before acquiring the heuristic validity acknowledged today, the Portuguese missionaries questioned the validity of the genealogic accounts described centuries later by Jan Vansina as 'oral traditions':<sup>13</sup>

One should not expect to find anything certain on the origin of that state and from the Princes who ruled it, before navigation revealed this country to the Europeans. Everything that the Congolese relate before that term is far from certain and appears to be a long fable, badly woven and poorly invented.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, Portuguese sources not only raise doubts as far as autochthonous writing and orality in Africa are concerned – the two poles that have shaped the debates on writing in Africa since the fifteenth century – they also offer precise indications on the extent of African libraries, although these should be taken with a pinch of salt. As an example, consider the exaggerations of Luis de Urreta, who marvels at the library of Prester John in Ethiopia:

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<sup>11</sup> He thus remained unable to consider these signs as something other than the trace of an external and former presence: 'Therefore I say that what the apostle sowed at the time is proof that Congo knew Christ for around 110 years.' Santissimo Sacramento 1583, fol. 24.

<sup>12</sup> L'Africain 1981, 49.

<sup>13</sup> Vansina 1961; Vansina 1985; Perrot 1989; Hofmeyr 1994; Barber 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Cavazzi 1687.

These beautiful libraries and all the famous ones [he said while talking about the libraries of Alexandra, Rome or Constantinople], are in no way comparable and would lose fame and glory were they to be compared with the library which the Prester John had in the monastery of Santa Cruz del Monte Amara; because it holds so many books that they cannot be counted.<sup>15</sup>

The enthusiasm of Luis de Urreta certainly stemmed from the political will of the time to make of Christian Ethiopia a strategic ally.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, it is still an invaluable testimony, reminding us about the persistence of the specificity of Ethiopianist studies which, to date, are generally classified as part of the Orientalist, and not Africanist, field of study.<sup>17</sup> On a different ground, it is hardly necessary to say, since the Portuguese and the missionaries accompanying them were behind this phenomenon, that the Portuguese sources can also inform us on the extent to which the Latin alphabet had penetrated sub-Saharan Africa before the systematic colonialist movement of the nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> The Congolese example is a particularly significant one, in which, barely a few years after the 1482 contact, writing found its place in all social domains: the elites, and the sons of King Alfonso in particular, were sent to Lisbon to learn how to read and write; language was fixed in the Latin alphabet for evangelisation purposes in particular; correspondence between the kingdom and Portugal, as well as between the local provinces, increased so much that they developed into the first archives; and written passes began to regulate the flow of goods and people soon after Portuguese irruption.<sup>19</sup>

Portuguese sources also give us unique information about another alphabet reaching Africa, an alphabet they had experienced over several centuries already, namely, the Arabic alphabet.<sup>20</sup> This was the case in North Africa, with the conquest of Ceuta in 1415, which usually marks the starting point of Lusitanian overseas expansion. It was also the case in West Africa; after rounding Cape Bojador in 1434, the Portuguese had no difficulty in recognising the alphabet of their archenemies. The roots of their antagonistic relationship with Arabic writing stemmed from the Muslim presence in the Iberian peninsula,<sup>21</sup> although one

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<sup>15</sup> Urreta 1610, Chapter VIII.

<sup>16</sup> Pennec 2003.

<sup>17</sup> This argument can be found with Ficquet/Mbodj-Pouye 2009.

<sup>18</sup> For a case study, see Madeira Santos 2002; Goody 1978; Delmas/Penn 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Hilton 1985, 79; Balandier 2013; Randles 1968.

<sup>20</sup> Hunwick/ O'Fahey 1994–2002; Moraes Farias 2003; Krätli/ Lydon 2011. Concerning East Africa, the literature is far more restricted and concerns more recent periods, see Bang 2011.

<sup>21</sup> See Monroe 1970.

should at once recall that such antagonism also marks a certain closeness, familiarity and even skill with the language and alphabet of the Quran.<sup>22</sup> It is in fact this familiarity that enabled them to enter the linguistic complexity of the Indian Ocean, and, before that, to communicate on African shores.<sup>23</sup> This linguistic familiarity with Arabic is clearly found in West Africa, where the first early modern trans-oceanic contacts took place. While the coast slowly revealed its secrets, the interior was widely fantasised about, as confirmed by the fact that the Portuguese, at the end of the fifteenth century, confused the Niger River with the Nile, for example, and were unable to locate Timbuktu. Yet, there was no need to go to this capital city, where many scholarly writing practices converged at the time (and where Europe continued to fantasise about a 'written Africa'), in order to testify to the ancient presence of writings at the coast. Valentim Fernandes, for example, a printer of German origin based in Lisbon and a collector of travelogues, mentioned at the end of the fifteenth century that in 'Gyloffa' (the Jolof Kingdom of Senegal),

The king and all the nobles and lords of the Province of Gyloffa are Muslims and have white *bischerijs* [marabout] who are priests and who preach Mohammed and know how to read and write. These *bischerijs* come from a long way in the interior, for example, from the kingdoms of Fez and Morocco, and they come to convert the blacks to their faith by their preaching. These *bischerijs* make amulets written in Arabic and the blacks hang them around their necks and also those of their horses.<sup>24</sup>

Because of its earliness, this quotation testifies to the antiquity of certain writing practices, the Quranic slate in particular, which is discussed at length in this book. As to the way the slate was perceived by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century, it seems to forecast the amulet paradigm that Europe applied to Muslim Africa from the nineteenth century onwards and sometimes up to today – a simplistic paradigm whereby everything written in Africa is perceived as relating to magic.<sup>25</sup> As recalled by Leo Africanus in the sixteenth century, again relying on Ibnu Rachich, 'it has been 900 years since Africans use Arabic characters', before

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<sup>22</sup> Kennedy 1996; Borges 2008.

<sup>23</sup> This is what is related by Gomes Eanes de Zurara, for example, in the famous *Chronicle of Guinea*. Zurara 2011, 113.

<sup>24</sup> And it continues as follows: 'When the Christians bring the horses which a great lord has bought or which he intends to buy, he brings one of the *bischerijs* with him who, before the horse is handed over, writes his blessings on a tablet of wood. He then takes a wooden basin full of water and washes the letters off the tablet and then gives the water to the horse to drink. After this the lord leads him away'. Newitt 2010, 76.

<sup>25</sup> Often called 'Black Islam'. See Hamès 2007.



concluding, ‘it is hardly surprising that African letters have disappeared’.<sup>26</sup> The link between autochthonous writing and the Arabic alphabet penetrating sub-Saharan Africa was already complete.

Autochthonous writings and explanations for their disappearance, doubts on the heuristic values of oral narratives, orientalist frenzies, talismanic readings and appropriation of foreign alphabets: these are avenues that make it possible to go beyond the sterile opposition between written and oral cultures. All these processes can be documented and historicised thanks to Portuguese sources. In this article, rather than following one of those avenues, we will propose a new one: encounter as the actual place for the irruption of writing, what we call the scriptural paradigm of encounters. Not only are encounters valuable testimonies, evidence-like almost, of the historical situation of the cultures involved,<sup>27</sup> as in the case of the encounter between Portuguese and Africans in the sixteenth century, they also generate writings of their own. To forge such a ‘third’ paradigm, which attempts to move away as much from the myth of the encounter between writing and orality as from its blind refutations, we will reconsider the encounter between Portuguese and Swahili on the East African coast, and more particularly the *Kilwa Chronicle*, which, in its written version at least, was most likely the fruit of this encounter.

### 3 Scriptural encounter

On the Swahili coast, once they had rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1497, the Lusitanians immediately became aware of the fact that they were making contact with a literate society. Many elements, such as architecture, clothing or, particularly, language, referred them back – with dread – to their ancient enemies the ‘Moors’ (they actually used this term to designate the residents of Southeast Africa, a term that marks par excellence that ‘strange familiarity’ evoked earlier on). One of the first preoccupations of the Portuguese, as mentioned by Camões, was to search for religious texts, whether to finally convince themselves about the dominant religion on the coast, or to identify – in vain – Christian allies. More than the quest for Scriptures, the use of writing from their very first meeting is still the best proof that the Portuguese were aware of the literacy of their new interlocutors. This is reflected in the fact that, for example, they immediately wanted to sign a treaty,

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<sup>26</sup> L’Africain 1981.

<sup>27</sup> Bertrand 2011.

as unequal as it was, thereby showing that the co-signatories were aware of each other's sovereignty and of its scriptural nature. Also, during Vasco da Gama's second trip in 1502, 'he at once sent his scribe from the shore, with a leaf of gold, upon which all was written down, and signed by the King.'<sup>28</sup>

The most direct element in this scriptural encounter is still the fact that both sides used letters to perform the first exchanges. Whether Vasco da Gama (1498, then 1502), Pedro Alvares Cabral (1500) or Francisco d'Almeida (1505), all used this medium. When he arrived in Kilwa in 1505, d'Almeida handed over to the Sultan 'a gift and a letter, of which one section was written in Arabic, the other in Portuguese.'<sup>29</sup>

Not only did the Portuguese have interpreters at their disposal, they also had proper translators who could handle both alphabets. While a few mistranslations might have taken place now and then,<sup>30</sup> these written exchanges helped avoid the physical encounters that were feared by both sides. Negotiations on whether meetings should take place on board the ship, in the Sultan's palace or on the beach, were endless. More so, the written correspondence made it possible to put not only the ship and the coast in direct contact, but also the two monarchies – despite the fact that the Portuguese King was thousands of kilometres away.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, writing rapidly reached its limits as a peace intermediary. When it became clear 'that this could not be settled by letter',<sup>32</sup> it meant that open conflict, which characterised this early sixteenth-century encounter, was not far away. And while in the context of generalised distrust, writing on paper remained a mark of honesty,<sup>33</sup> the desire of the Portuguese to take over the commercial network of East Africa meant that this encounter would soon turn into armed conflict. Since Vasco da Gama's first trip, assassinations and hostage-taking were routine practice, although in 1505 the conflict assumed a larger scale. Acting on

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**28** Freeman-Grenville 1962, 70. 'He instructed them to say that they were the ships of the king of Portugal, and that they came there from him to make a treaty' (60). More generally, on treaties, see Biker 1983. For a review of the literature on these treaties, see McKenzie 1985 and Delmas/Penn 2012.

**29** Freeman-Grenville 1962, 62.

**30** For a discussion on these texts in the Portuguese archives, see Aubin 2000. For Mozambique, see *Documentos* 1962.

**31** 'He carried my letters and messages for its king, to establish peace with him, and a treaty concerning purchases and trade at the said mine.' Freeman-Grenville 1962, 64. Correspondence as a tool for governing remotely is discussed by Delmas 2013, 157–184.

**32** Freeman-Grenville 1962, 67.

**33** '[Capitain major] should send him [King of Kilwa] a signed paper, affirmed upon the head of the King of Portugal, to the effect that he would do him no harm, nor use constraint, and would allow him to return to land freely.' Freeman-Grenville 1962, 67.

instructions from Lisbon, the Viceroy of the Indies, Francisco d'Almeida, organised the sacking of Kilwa, thereby initiating a difficult occupation that lasted until 1512 but was never really completed. It was a short yet no less devastating occupation of a city that, up to that point, had dominated the East African coast, from Mogadiscio to Sofala. Kilwa had traded with the entire Indian Ocean region, and its economic and cultural influence reached far into the African hinterland.<sup>34</sup>

The humiliating Portuguese occupation is related in the *Kilwa Chronicle*. While correspondence and treaties are found in other African contexts (in the majority of them, in fact), and describe the *modus operandi* of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean, the salient element of the Lusitano-Swahili encounter is that we have written testimonies of the respective views of this conflict. And the gap between the two views of the same event is considerable, as shown by the Swahili narrative of the arrival of the Portuguese:

They had three ships, and the name of their captain was al-Mirati [Vasco da Gama]. The Lord of Mafia rejoiced, for they thought [the Franks] were good and honest men. But those who knew the truth confirmed that they were corrupt and dishonest persons who had only come to spy out the land in order to seize it.<sup>35</sup>

## 4 Variations

The Portuguese sought to know ever more about the outrageous prosperity of Kilwa, a city they simply had to admire.<sup>36</sup> They did so in order to break the commercial circuits established by Kilwa between Africa and the Indian Ocean, wherever they could not turn them to their own advantage. Learning about its history was the key. While the readings of that very first encounter are unavoidably different, both Portuguese and Swahili, by the sixteenth century, seem to agree on the history preceding the Portuguese irruption on the East African coast, the ancient history of the island, the history of its 'foundation' and 'its kings':<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> For a comprehensive study of the commercial role played by Kilwa in the distribution of goods throughout the Indian Ocean, see Beaujard 2012, 287–320.

<sup>35</sup> Freeman-Grenville 1962, 48.

<sup>36</sup> 'There are many vaulted mosques, one of which is like that of Cordova' (Freeman-Grenville 1962, 108).

<sup>37</sup> For the Portuguese version, we use Barros 1932, 308 sq. The first modern version is by McCall Theal 1898–1903, 233–244.

The reason for their leaving Shiraz in Persia was their Sultan one day dreamed a dream. He was called Hasan Ibn Ali: he was the father of these six men and the seventh of those who left.<sup>38</sup>

And so begins the *Kilwa Chronicle*, that long genealogical story of the kings of Kilwa, from the foundation of the city by Persians from Shiraz in the tenth century until the arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. Following a dream about the fall of his kingdom, Ali, the Sultan of Shiraz, or son of the Sultan, sailed with his six sons to found a new state. Hugging the East African coast, he stopped on the island of Kilwa, which is very close to the coast, and which he supposedly bought by paying with colourful clothes that were in such quantities that, sleeve to sleeve, they could circle the island. If today, the Shirazi origin of the Swahili is the subject of major debate,<sup>39</sup> nevertheless, there is no doubt that the Portuguese in the sixteenth century took this origin at face value. Indeed, we have at our disposal two versions of the said Chronicle: the Portuguese version, which appeared in the first of the famous *Decades* by João de Barros in 1552,<sup>40</sup> and the Arabic version, linguistically as well as alphabetically, referred to as the *Kitāb al-Sulwa*. Although the two *Kilwa Chronicles* offer two diametrically opposed readings of the sixteenth-century conflict, they match almost perfectly where the genealogy of the ancient Kings of Kilwa is concerned. The chronicles relate the successes and defeats of the descendants of Ali, how the latter were credited with the development and beautification of the city, how Kilwa's sovereignty was extended to neighbouring islands, how a fisherman unexpectedly discovered Sofala and its lucrative gold trade, how the Shirazi dynasty was replaced by the Mahdali dynasty in the thirteenth century, as well as the endless succession conflicts that followed until the fifteenth century.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, the *Chronicle* and the *Kitāb* differ on more than one occasion. To begin with, the two stories do not agree on Ali's rank before he left Persia. In Barros's words:

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**38** For the Arabic version, we use the Omani version *Juḥayna: al-akhbār fī tārikh zanjibā*, and Freeman-Grenville's translation (correct most of the time). The first modern edition was completed by Strong 1985, 383–430.

**39** Briefly, nineteenth-century colonial historiography tended to take the Shirazi genealogy of the Swahili at face value, a bit like the Portuguese had done in the sixteenth century. As a reaction, an important revision was carried out after Independence and consisted in uncovering anthropological or cultural features that made the Swahili descendants of Africans, and not of an external civilisation. See Pouwels 1984; Allen 1982; Horton 2000; Spear 1984; Middleton 1992. Of note also are the archaeological works of Chittick who questioned written sources in the light of the material evidence, Chittick 1974.

**40** The original text is Barros 1552–1553.

**41** The most complete work on this genealogy to date is that of Saad 1979.

According to what we learn from a chronicle of the kings of this town, [...] [The Sultan of Shiraz], at his death, left seven sons. One, named Ali, was held in little esteem by his brothers, as his mother was a slave of the Abyssinian race, and their mother was of noble lineage of Persia. As this son was a man who made up in personal qualifications and prudence for what he lacked in lineage, to avoid the insults and ill-treatment of his brothers, he set out in search of a new country where he might perchance enjoy greater fortune than among his own people.<sup>42</sup>

According to Barros, Ali supposedly packed up and left with a view to founding a kingdom to which he could not lay claim back home, due to his maternal lineage that, in Asia, was felt to be marked by its origins in African slavery. The Arabic version seems to contradict this assertion when, after relating Ali's departure in greater detail, it announces that:

This is based on strong evidence, that they were kings in their own country, and is a refutation of those who deny it. God knows all the truth!<sup>43</sup>

Another important variant – and at this stage I would like to apologise for mobilising this philological vocabulary, these variants being so flagrant – concerns the other end of the genealogical tree structuring the story. It concerns the legitimacy of the monarch in power when the Portuguese arrived. As such, the Portuguese version intends to show that Ibrāhīm b. Sulaymān (or Abraham, i.e. 'Habraemo' for the Portuguese), the monarch on the throne when the Lusitanians arrived, was a usurper, a 'tyrāno', and that his forced exile on the continent was greatly justified. Ibrahim's exclusion from any kinship ties with the royal family also helped the Portuguese justify their opting to crown a puppet monarch, Rukn al-Dīn, known to them as Mohamed Ancony ('Mahamd Anconij'), who had been co-operating since Cabral's trip in 1500. He was then rewarded with a forced enthronement five years later,

Dom Francisco received [Mohamed Ancony] most kindly, raised him in his arms, and began to console him, telling him not to be alarmed, as a loyal man like himself should have no fear, but had only to expect favours and honours, and that the title of King of Kilwa which he wished to bestow upon him in the name of the King his Lord would be the first honour.<sup>44</sup>

One can see right through it: the narrative strategy of the Portuguese consisted in placing the story of the imperial conquest of Kilwa in the continuity of the ancient history of the island's sovereignty. In fact, such a strategy had been applied prior

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<sup>42</sup> Freeman-Grenville 1962, 89.

<sup>43</sup> Freeman-Grenville 1962, 36.

<sup>44</sup> Freeman-Grenville 1962, 94.

to the printing of the chronicle. The narrative genius of Barros, who included the story of the Portuguese intrusion into local history, is quite evidently the continuation (or complement) of the political genius of Almeida who, once he was on site in 1505, also called upon genealogy to legitimate the conquest.<sup>45</sup> During the coronation ceremony, which took place in both languages, with ‘an interpreter repeating his proclamation in Arabic’,<sup>46</sup> he had promptly inscribed the new Portuguese sovereignty into a long history:<sup>47</sup>

Dom Francisco d’Almeida, although he had not such detailed information on the succession of these kings as we have related, nevertheless learned from Mohamed Ancony that the people were not satisfied with the said Abraham, and how much they all desired to raise to the throne a king nearer the royal line.<sup>48</sup>

The aforementioned Mohamed Ancony did not last long. He was assassinated the following year. The Portuguese then insisted that his son should take the throne, to no avail: his sovereignty was not accepted and the trade that had brought so much wealth to Kilwa did not pick up again. They had to face the fact that genealogical tampering was not easy. Ibrahim’s nephew, closer to the royal lineage, was then enthroned in 1506. In the end, Ibrahim himself, at eighty-four years of age, was thrilled to re-ascend the throne after the Portuguese left in 1512. This restoration after the Portuguese interlude is related in the *Kitāb*, in the last three chapters to be exact, which are unfortunately missing, and which are otherwise mentioned in the table of contents.

The why of these variants, i.e. the diametrically opposed views on the Portuguese irruption, or the disagreements about the legitimate heir to the throne, is easily explained: in either case, we are dealing with political writing, and where

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<sup>45</sup> This manipulation of genealogy in a context of conquest is reminiscent of many other cases, particularly in the Americas where the Spaniards looked for Inca and Aztec monarchs. See Bradshaw 1993. Otherwise, for a critical review of the status of genealogy in early modern Europe, see Bizzocchi 2010.

<sup>46</sup> Freeman-Grenville 1962, 94.

<sup>47</sup> ‘To this place all the principal Moors of the town came, summoned by a proclamation that Dom Francisco had caused to be published, and when they were assembled an officer proclaimed in a loud voice in Portuguese – an interpreter repeating his proclamation in Arabic – the different motives of their meeting, the treachery of Abraham, who had been governor of the town, in taking up arms against the king his lord, which treachery had been the cause of his losing the government of the town [and he] delivered it over, with the title of king, to the honourable and loyal Mohamed Ancony.’ Freeman-Grenville 1962, 94–95.

<sup>48</sup> Freeman-Grenville 1962, 93.

the genealogy dates as far back as possible it only serves to legitimate contradictory views on the sovereignty of the island and the region in the sixteenth century. If explaining the why of the chronicle is not so difficult, the how is not so obvious: how can it be that the same chronicle has two versions that, while differing at the extremities, match in content in most of the text? How could one have been printed in Lisbon in 1552, while the other, handwritten in Arabic went from the archives of the Sultan of Zanzibar to the British Museum in the nineteenth century? Should we believe that, as has been implied to date, there is an original version of the *Kilwa Chronicle*?<sup>49</sup>

## 5 Co-writing

João de Barros was quite evidently the most important contemporary chronicler of Portuguese maritime expansion, so much so that he is perceived today as the true ideologist of Lusitanian imperialism. In his attempt to portray this overseas undertaking, he not only produced the most accomplished theoretical and legal texts, but he also brought together every move of the expansion in his famous *Decades*. After Barros's death in 1570, this patient work was resumed by Diogo do Couto in Goa, not Lisbon, which his predecessor had never left.<sup>50</sup> Barros had been appointed *Feitor da Casa da Índia* in 1532, a position that enabled him to draw on many sources while writing his *Decades of Asia*. Somehow, he became the Crown's official historiographer. At *Casa da Índia*, he had access to the official correspondence with Portugal's possessions in Asia, to cartographic and administrative information, to written stories as well as stories that were reported verbally by all sorts of travellers, captains and other survivors of Portuguese peregrinations. From Lisbon, he could also use written sources gathered by travellers throughout the Indian Ocean and brought back to Europe. Such philological appropriation is found throughout the *Decades*. For instance, before embarking on

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49 Quoting all the works in which the *Kilwa Chronicle* is taken to be sufficient evidence for the existence of a written tradition on the East African coast prior to the European irruption, or even as evidence of a local historiographical tradition, would take too long. Freeman-Grenville considers for example that we are dealing with two summaries of the same text: 'the following passage [of Barros's *Asia*] includes a brief summary of a Chronicle of the Kings of Kilwa. Another summary, based upon the same source as that of de Barros, is to be found in an apparently unique Arabic manuscript in the British Museum, Or. 2666.' Freeman-Grenville 1962, 80.

50 We still lack a comprehensive biography of Barros. See however Banha de Andrade 1980; Boxer 1980 and Subrahmanyam 2005a.

the story of the Muslim penetration of India, he specified that, ‘in this account that we have made, since we have had all the chronicles and they were translated for us, we will now follow the version of the Moors’.<sup>51</sup>

Better still, in the introduction, he specified that he elaborated his work by ‘following what the Persian and Arabs [wrote] in their Tarigh’.<sup>52</sup> The way Barros used material from all over the world led some historians, such as Charles Boxer, to make of him the ‘father of Orientalism’.<sup>53</sup> Even if he explicitly criticised this laudatory designation, Sanjay Subrahmanyam has made Barros the champion, or at least the missing link, of another tradition, that of ‘global history’ or ‘xenologic writing’, and this because of the books that travelled from far away to the shelves of his library:

While Barros’ collection did not reach us, we know that he succeeded in laying his hands on texts in Chinese, Arabic, Swahili, Persian and Kannada.<sup>54</sup>

Given that the *Kilwa Chronicle* was an Arabic text in language and alphabet, Subrahmanyam’s appellation, ‘a text in Swahili’, seems out of place to say the least.<sup>55</sup> But in Subrahmanyam’s defence, while Barros explicitly refers to some non-European texts brought to him, he tells us nothing or almost nothing about the *Kilwa Chronicle*, save for what he wrote in the second chapter of the second book: ‘according to what we learn from a chronicle of the kings of this town’. How

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<sup>51</sup> ‘Of the site of the city of Ormuz, situated on the island of Gerum; and on its foundation, and the kings it had since it was founded until the year 1507 when Alfonso de Albuquerque arrived here’ or still further in the same chapter on ‘how the moors made themselves lords of the Decan Kingdom and the state of Goa’. On that occasion he explained that ‘[t]here is considerable divergence on the [matter of] the entry of the Moors by arms into India, between the Gentiles and them, particularly in regard of the concordance of dates; because the Moors of the Gujarat kingdom write of it in one way, those of Deccan kingdom in another, and the chronicles of the Gentiles kings of Bisnaga take another route [...]. And in this account that we have made, since we have had all the chronicles and they were translated for us, we will follow the version now of the Moors [...] because they conform closely in the matter of the dates with the General Chronicles of the Persians, which is the Tarigh of which we made mention in the beginning, which we possess together with other volumes of history and Persians cosmography from those parts’. Barros 1932, 48 (Chapter 2 of the Second Book of the Second *Decade*).

<sup>52</sup> Barros 1932, I, 5, 8.

<sup>53</sup> Boxer 1980, 119.

<sup>54</sup> Subrahmanyam 2014, 45. Subrahmanyam certainly understands Swahili at the linguistic level, which does not justify his mistake, if nothing in the chronicle is borrowed from the Swahili language.

<sup>55</sup> We do not know of any text in Swahili from this period. The earliest Swahili *‘ajamī* dates to seventeenth century. My acknowledgement to D. Bondarev for this information.



did this chronicle end up on his desk in Lisbon, in which language was it and in which format, if indeed it ever really fell into his hands?<sup>56</sup> There is that second mention also, already noted, in which Barros says that he knows a bit more than d'Almeida about the ancient genealogy of Kilwa,<sup>57</sup> although here again nothing confirms the presence of a text brought back from Africa.

Before returning to this theme, let us look at the scriptural situation in Kilwa at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese. The inscriptions and coins excavated by archaeologists can reassure us on that score,<sup>58</sup> inasmuch as very few of the many observations made by travellers concern manuscripts. On their arrival, the Portuguese who were staggered by the beauty of the decorations and inscriptions did not notice a single library or mention any specific manuscript. Before them, Arabic testimonies, such as that of Ibn Battuta who also marvelled at the beauty of the place, do not at any time mention writing practices.<sup>59</sup> While the absence of evidence is not proof, we still presume that, as a Muslim society, Kilwa did possess the Quran of course, some *hadiths* most certainly, as well as some works of *tafsīr* and the juridical literature, or *fiqh*. Some say that climatic conditions are almost certainly behind the fact that, today, we have no trace of these ancient books in East Africa, unlike in other Islamized regions of Africa.<sup>60</sup> There is nothing or almost nothing regarding writing at this time, save for the well-known anecdote, at the very beginning of the Muslim religion in East Africa, of an act of

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56 To take but one example, Elias Saad, as precise as he is, seems to take this at face value: 'Barros became Factor of the India House in Lisbon, and there had access to all the documents of the Portuguese discoverers and officials who served under the Viceroy of the Indies. Among others which came into his hands was a "Chronica dos Reyes de Quiloa", a "Chronicle of the Kings of Kilwa"' (Saad 1979, 51). Likewise, Sir John Gray 1951, 2: 'The *Kitab* was certainly in existence at the time of the first advent of the Portuguese at the very beginning of the sixteenth century. One copy thereof came into possession of some Portuguese official who took it back with him to Lisbon. The copy was translated into Portuguese and the translation was used by historian, John de Barros, in the completion of his *Da Asia*, the first volume of which appeared in 1552.'

57 'Dom Francisco d'Almeida, although he had not such detailed information of the succession of these kings as we have related.' Freeman-Grenville 1962, 93.

58 See Chittick 1974.

59 The actual travel of Ibn Battuta to Kilwa was recently questioned, fairly convincingly, by Fauvelle-Aymar/Hirsch 2003.

60 One can only wonder why we have never thought about the Swahili culture in relation to writing. The recent literature mentioned above (n 41) completely omits the issue of written culture, even though this is an essential characteristic of an Islamic society. One recent exception is Vierke 2014.

reading that would make it possible to distinguish believers from infidels and the island from the continent:

Cloth was spread from the island to the mainland and Mrimba passed over. But Mrimba decided to return and strike down Sultan Ali, so Ali had the Quran read out as a spell so that Mrimba could not cross over the island.<sup>61</sup>

Was there a written historiographical tradition in Kilwa when the Portuguese arrived? Must we continue to consider the *Kilwa Chronicle* as sufficient proof of the existence of a historical library in Kilwa, as the literature on the chronicle blindly assumes? Not only are we desperately short of evidence that could corroborate such a tradition, but the *Kilwa Chronicle*, rather than proof of its existence, could just as well be a sign of its absence. The main argument in favour of this somewhat disillusioned hypothesis is that the content of the Arabic chronicle clearly makes one think that it is a reply to the Portuguese chronicle. The two chronicles somehow seem to converse from a distance and reply to each other. First, chronologically, the fact that the story of the Portuguese irruption is found in the *Kitāb*, even though the last three chapters did not reach us, compels us to consider that one draft is from the sixteenth century at the earliest. Secondly, the variations between the two versions, as previously pointed out, do indeed make us think that the Arabic chronicle was written in response to the allegations of the Portuguese version. The chronology of the two texts can be seen very clearly in the genealogical tampering in the sixteenth century, and the restoration of the royal lineage when the Portuguese left. But it is even more explicit as far as the more or less noble origin of the tenth-century founders is concerned, where it is specified that it is 'a refutation of those who deny it'. Who first rejected Ali's rank if not the Portuguese version of the chronicle? Finally, the title 'The Book of Consolation of the History of Kilwa' suggests that one piece of writing is a response to another, i.e. the *Crónica* is not so much a result of the reading of the *Kitāb*, it is rather the opposite. The fact remains that the content of the two versions of the *Kilwa Chronicle*, a text that, for so long, sufficed to proclaim or even celebrate the presence of a historiographical tradition on the Swahili coast, can also corroborate honest scepticism, and might even replace one silence with an even more established silence.

As such, the hypothesis of 'writing as a response', or of a 'co-writing' of the chronicle, where the two versions reply to each other, is quite plausible, certainly

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<sup>61</sup> The reference is that of 'histoire ancienne de Kilwa Kisiwani', translated from Swahili and published by Velten 1907. Quotes from Pouwels 2000, 257 who himself quotes Freeman-Grenville 1962, 222.

more so than that of an original text supposedly crossing oceans to end up on a printing press in Lisbon. Nonetheless, it leaves many questions unanswered, starting with the improbable Swahili reading of Barros's printed book.<sup>62</sup> And before that, if Barros did not have an original text at his disposal, how did he manage to obtain so much information on the ancient history of Kilwa? This question could be answered with the hypothesis of an oral story reduced to writing. Rather than a written chronicle, it is possible that Barros had at his disposal the work of informants who gathered the elements of a genealogical tradition, still very much alive at that time. Such transcription work would be reminiscent of the one carried out in anticipation of the previously mentioned ceremony of 1505. It might even have started earlier, specifically with Mohammed Ancony, who was so quick to collaborate with the Portuguese after 1500, and who could have offered such a version of Kilwa's genealogical history. This would explain, for example, why the last three monarchs – Sulaiman, Kiwab and Abraham – were described as 'tyrants' in the Portuguese version. The linguistic argument also goes in the direction of this hypothesis: the phonetic spelling of the proper nouns in the *Decades* seems to indicate oral transmission and transcription. This is particularly the case for some of the first Shirazi kings: 'Alī b. Bāshatī became Ale Busoloquete and Khālid b. Bakr became Ale Bonebaquer. If these names had been directly transliterated from the Arabic to the Latin alphabet, their spelling would have been quite different.

## 6 Copying

The copy of the Arabic version kept at the British Museum under shelfmark Or. 2666 is dated from 1837. It was taken from the collection of Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn, who was Qadi of Zanzibar between 1837 and 1870, and was handed over by Sayyid Barghash to the British consul Sir John Kirk in 1872. This copy is incomplete and ends with the mention 'lacuna', handwritten by the copyist; the colophon informs us:

The writing of this book was completed on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> Jamad [sic] al-Awal A. H. 1294 (20 May 1877). It was done at the command of the ruler [which] Almighty God has set over us,

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<sup>62</sup> Published in 1552, the book would have had to cross oceans, and someone capable of reading Portuguese would have had to propose a reply, in writing this time, which seems rather unlikely. For the distribution of Portuguese books in the Indies, see Subrahmanyam 2005b.

the Imam of the Muslims, Sayyid Bargash ibn Sa'id ibn Sultan. May God increase his wisdom and power! The scribe was the creature of God 'Abdullah ibn Musbah al-Suwafi, and he wrote with his own hand.<sup>63</sup>

Unfortunately, the previous colophons were not copied in the nineteenth century. However, throughout the *Kitāb*, other extracts tell us about its writing, or even its author. For instance, in the introduction, the author speaks about an order given by the Sultan of Kilwa, whose name is not mentioned: '[i]t was His Highness the Sultan who desired me to write a book to inform him of the history of the kings who ruled Kilwa'.<sup>64</sup>

As indicated previously, two elements compel us to consider that such an order was given in the sixteenth century. Firstly, although the content of the last chapters is missing, nevertheless, the titles of these chapters give the names of the Sultans who reigned in the sixteenth century, Chapter 10 being entitled 'The Reign of Sultan Muhammad Mikatu, Son of the Amir Kiwabi, and the Rest of the History of the Restoration of the Amir Ibrahim'. Secondly, like the expression 'restoration', the expressions 'consolation', as found in the title, or 'sorrow', when mentioning a contemporary reader of the draft, certainly refer to the Portuguese occupation. 'When I gave it to a critic to read, it drove him to talk of his sorrows',<sup>65</sup> says the author. Better still, Chapter Seven offers two very specific indications concerning the author:

The writer of this book was born on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Shawwal, 904 A. H., which began on a Monday, in the time of Sultan Fudail and the Amir Ibrahim. The writer was called by the name of the writer we have already mentioned.<sup>66</sup> [...] When the people of Kilwa saw there was no means of evading him, they sent the Amir Ibrahim in a vessel. He was accompanied by the commander Sulaiman, Faqih Ayub and Faqih Omar. These two were the sons of Faqih Muflah al-Malindi, and they were maternal uncles of the writer of this book.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Saad 1979, 49.

<sup>64</sup> Freeman-Grenville 1962, 34.

<sup>65</sup> Freeman-Grenville 1962, 34.

<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately, there is nothing in the remainder of the text that allows us to find that name again. Here is the Arabic version: *Wa-qīla sanat al-ithnayn, wulida mu'allif hādihā al-ta'lif yawm al-ithnayn, thānī min shahr Shawwāl sanat arb'ah wa-tis'ami'ah. Wa-dhālik fī dawlat al-Faql wa-al-Amīr Ibrāhīm, wa yusammā al-mu'allif bi-ism al-mu'allif al-madhkūr.*

<sup>67</sup> To be more specific, in the Arabic version, 'I' is used instead of 'writer of this book': *Fa-jahazū al-Amīr Ibrāhīm wa ṭala'ūhu ilā markabihim. Wa-ṣaḥabahu fī al-ṭulū' al-muqaddam Sulaymān, wa-al-faqīh Ayyūb, wa-al-faqīh 'Umar, wa-humā awlād al-faqīh Muflīh al-Malandī, wa humā akhwāl al-mu'allif.*

In short, one of the authors of the Chronicle, whether through his date of birth, his family or the Sultans under whose reigns he lived, is clearly identified as being a contemporary of the Portuguese irruption and the restoration. Is this enough to refute any writing prior to the sixteenth century? In the fourth chapter, a final reference is made to the writing of the text. It concerns a tree deposited by the waves on the shore of Kilwa, as if by a miracle, at a time when a lack of wood prevented the Mosque from being rebuilt:

The author has himself seen the man who saw the tree as mentioned, and he is Sultan Muḥammad ibn Sultan al-Husain ibn Sultan Sulaiman. The latter gave the order for the rebuilding of the mosque, while the first named ordered the writing of this history.<sup>68</sup>

The final remark certainly seems to indicate the existence of an earlier text. Indeed, the reconstruction of the Great Mosque of Kilwa, which is confirmed archaeologically,<sup>69</sup> dates from the reign of Sulaymān b. Muḥammad (1421–1442). We could then be dealing with a chronicle that was written and rewritten on different occasions, by scribes whose function was not only to reproduce an identical manuscript, but also to complete it. However, given Ibrahim's age when he re-ascended the throne in 1512, i.e. no less than eighty years old, it is quite plausible that he is both the son of the Sultan who had the Mosque rebuilt and, at the same time, the person sponsoring this genealogical work after the departure of the Portuguese, certainly with a view to ensuring that no future intruder would be able to modify his genealogy at will.

## 7 Sharing historiographical genres

The lack of evidence as far as the material production and circulation of the *Kilwa Chronicle* is concerned calls for caution. Nevertheless, none of the evidence at our disposal seems incompatible with the previously mentioned hypothesis according to which the chronicle would have been co-written as a result of the encounter. The existence of a common genealogical substrate from which both texts

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<sup>68</sup> Freeman-Grenville 1962, 40. And for the Arabic version: *Wa-qad ra'aytu man ra'a tilka al-khashabah 'alā šifatihā al-madhkūra. Wa-huwa al-sultān Muḥammad b. al-sultān Ḥusayn b. al-sultān Sulaymān. Wa-huwa alladhī amara bi-binā' al-masjid al-madhkūr, wa al-sultān Muḥammad huwa alladhī amara bi-ta'lif hādihā al-tārikh. Wa-Allah a'lam.*

<sup>69</sup> Chittick 1974. This is also Saad's hypothesis: 'Our central thesis is that the earlier chronicle was written in the mid-1400's and was subsequently censored or in some other way damaged before reaching the author.' Saad 1979, 197.

drew is not in doubt, but the existence of an original written chronicle, of which the two known versions are supposedly only two distant variants – or two ‘abstracts’, in the words of Eli Saad<sup>70</sup> – does create doubt. That genealogical tradition precedes the arrival of the Portuguese is one thing; that the need to reduce it to writing only emerged later is another. According to us, this need to reduce it to writing was born of the sixteenth-century encounter. On the Portuguese side, it resulted from the desire to know ancient history in order to include the new imperial possessions into the work of narration. The *Decades of Asia* embodies such a political and historiographical endeavour. On the Swahili side, writing – or updating – a chronicle seems to be a response to the sovereignty challenges posed by the European occupation. In any case, the paradigm of the scriptural encounter should certainly be put to the test in other situations, in West Africa for example.<sup>71</sup>

This paradigm of a common origin of writing born of an encounter,<sup>72</sup> regardless of any possible disagreement it might raise, also raises the issue of genres. Barros’s inclusion in his history of a ‘chronicle of the kings of this city’ seems to short-circuit tradition. Indeed, to what extent can we say that they belong to two different genres if they are born of a shared (although opposed) necessity, resulting from contact? On several occasions and without any further details, the author of the Arabic chronicle refers to ‘historians’ (*ahl al-tawārikh*):

Historians have said, among their assertions, that the first man to come to Kilwa came in the following way’ [...] or ‘I understand from a person interested in history, and one whom I trust’ [...] or still ‘In the time of Sultan Sulaiman ibn al Malik al-Adil historians say that the Friday mosque, which collapsed in the reign of Abu al Mawahib, was restored.’<sup>73</sup>

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**70** ‘De Barros does not provide a direct translation of the Sunna al-Kilawia of which the Arabic version is an abstract. [...] In sum, we have two different abstracts from two different points of view.’ Saad 1979, 51–52.

**71** This hypothesis is reminiscent of other cases, in West Africa for example, where the famous Timbuktu Chronicles as found in the *Tārīkh al-fattāsh*, could just as well be the result of Moroccan intrusion (see Moraes Farias 2008, 95–108). Or, still, in Madagascar, where the seventeenth-century *Sorabe* followed the arrival of the Europeans (see Beaujard 2007, 219–265). Apart from this, this hypothesis seems to correspond to R.L. Pouwels anthropological hypothesis, according to which the Portuguese irruption provoked a kind of “renaissance”, and, at the same time, led to the displacement of the centre of the Swahili coast towards Paté (see Pouwels 2000, 251–271).

**72** Rather than two views on the same event from two traditions, the *Kilwa Chronicle* must be conceived of as the – double – fruit of an encounter. This goes against the ‘symmetrical history’ as proposed recently by Romain Bertrand who considers that two opposite perspectives on the same encounter build two incommensurable traditions. Bertrand 2011.

**73** Freeman-Grenville 1962, 35.

In these three cases, it might be less a question of referring to a real and identifiable historical library than to giving weight to the veracity of a distant event. The simple fact of mentioning historians, which is in no way evidence of a reading act, is an affirmation of memory, as though historians were those who knew how to remember. But there is a fourth case, in the introduction this time, where the author explains that: '[I have] begun my work by giving an account of the intellect and the arts of the mind and have followed that with an account of history and its cause'.<sup>74</sup>

Unfortunately, this theoretical introduction, which could have informed us about the tradition the author perceived as being his, did not reach us. The fact remains that references to "historians' readings" are sufficient to corroborate the fact that the *Kitāb al-Sulwa* is certainly part of a richer generic tradition. There is nothing absurd about thinking that the historico-genealogical genre, found extensively in the Middle East at the time, was imported into East Africa via the Muslim religion, and via the Arabic language and alphabet.<sup>75</sup> But while the genealogical genre in the Muslim world, which often goes back to the Prophet, is well known, the material conditions of its exercise are much less so.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, they are the ones which largely determine the content of genealogical history. In the case of the *Kilwa Chronicle*, it seems that it is not about accumulating information in the form of archives and compiling them in a *Tārīkh* or *Kitāb* but, rather, about completing information on the past by adding information about the present, even if it means possibly erasing previous information. It is not so much about accumulation as it is about updating. The copyist necessarily becomes both author and historian<sup>77</sup>, responsible for filling in the temporal distance between himself and the previous copyist. But we are still dealing with suppositions here, as the historiographical consequences of the medium, i.e. the manuscript, still have to be established.<sup>78</sup>

As soon as Barros included it in the *Decades*, the *Kilwa Chronicle* could no longer claim to illustrate the Muslim world alone, or the so-called African Islam tradition. We are dealing here with a 'textual contact' carried out by including an

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<sup>74</sup> Quoted by Saad 1979, 4, 48 before commenting, 49: 'The introduction is a philosophical treatise, irrelevant to the history of Kilwa, and may be ignored'. Freeman-Grenville 1962, 34 seems to have thought along the same lines: 'This translation has been made by the editor of the British Museum manuscript, with the omission of the introduction, which is a theological disquisition wholly irrelevant to the history'.

<sup>75</sup> See Insoll 2003.

<sup>76</sup> Rosenthal 1968; Donner 1998; Al-Duri 1983; Khalidi 1994; Robinson 2003; Robinson 2015.

<sup>77</sup> For such a view, see Canfora 2012.

<sup>78</sup> See Déroche 2004.

African chronicle in a European compilation. What exactly does the inclusion of an allogenic genre into a wider story mean? The *Kilwa Chronicle* and, more generally, the scriptural paradigm of encounters where writing emerges from a common necessity, goes against a vision in which the respective recording systems necessarily lead to incommensurable written traditions, even when they deal with the same event.<sup>79</sup> On the contrary, if two chronicles can be the unique fruit of the same encounter, resorting to a “third language” to assess their difference becomes obsolete.<sup>80</sup> Barros’s inclusion is not the expression of an impenetrable boundary between historiographies, as Romain Bertrand for example would seem to prefer, but exactly the opposite. Are we thus dealing with a qualitative or epistemological ‘leap’, as proposed by Subrahmanyam?

I think Barros [...] is an important man for [...] his openness towards the non-European sources of history, and for his desire to give up a universal and symmetrical history in favour of a global and cumulative history, built around connections.<sup>81</sup>

While this may be so, the fact remains that we cannot study the circulation of genres, the porosity found between *Tārīkh* and *Crónica* for example,<sup>82</sup> independently of the circulation of the texts embodying these genres and, at another level, of the material and social conditions of their being written, kept and circulated. In other words, the study of the circulation of genres, which is above all a

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**79** With the encounter between Portuguese and Africans on the East African coast, we are far from –even on the opposite side of – Romain Bertrand’s conclusion concerning the encounter between Dutch and Javanese a few decades later: ‘As such, in a certain way, the encounter between the Dutch and the Javanese did not take place – at least in the form of shared awareness of a fact likely to be narrated’ Bertrand 2011, 308. ‘History on equal grounds’ should not consist – even in the name of documentary symmetry – of building up and reifying incommensurability, when writing and even historiographical genres were actually born of the encounter.

**80** ‘In order to challenge these incommensurabilities, it is impossible to adopt an overhanging position or to resort to a third language transcending all other reasons: as soon as one must account for an encounter between social worlds that were separate up until then, any viewpoint is biased. Consequently, to somehow conduct the story, there are no other possibilities but to navigate constantly between worlds, without mooring more than necessary to one or the other.’ Bertrand 2011, 321. In the case of Kilwa in the sixteenth century, the two worlds were well moored, to the extent that they spoke the same language and wrote the same story.

**81** Subrahmanyam 2014, 47 or, still, 43: ‘Confronted with this vast world, the Portuguese – who were not in great numbers – could not envisage mass conquest. Nonetheless, they still had ambition for an epistemological conquest, i.e. to write down their explorations by focusing on their homeland.’

**82** Subrahmanyam 2010.



circulation of texts, can certainly not do without a philology capable of apprehending ‘textual contact’ in all its dimensions, and, specifically, in its material dimension. The challenge for Barros, and for the Portuguese who provided him with a publishable text, was political and immediate, as was in fact Ibrahim’s. It is nonetheless epistemological: tampering with royal lineage can only be carried out on an authoritative text. The necessity of mobilising a foreign chronicle to establish one’s own history becomes obvious. In this light, the European colonial canon could not but rely on extra-European writing.<sup>83</sup> Its heuristic authority was granted only through this generic exteriority. Such a necessity can be found at the very beginning of European imperial expansion, again with the Portuguese, and again on African soil. In the *Crónica da tomada de Ceuta*, Gomes Eanes de Zurara, who also became the chronicler of Guinea, adopted and relied on an Arabic text to relate the foundation of Ceuta:

And it is recounted by Abilabez [Abi al-‘Abbas], who was a man of great learning among the Moors, that this city was founded two hundred and thirty-three years after the destruction brought by the flood. [...] And he states that the city’s founder was Noah’s grandson and that this was the first city he founded in all the lands of Africa.<sup>84</sup>

Barros’s integration of the *Kilwa Chronicle* into the eighth book of his first *Decade*, one century later, was motivated in the same way. The Portuguese needed to impress the authority of their own writings on those they encountered, even if this meant writing a chronicle that had never been written before.

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<sup>83</sup> See Delmas 2016.

<sup>84</sup> Quoted by Blackmore 2006, 35.

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Tal Tamari

# Bamana Texts in Arabic Characters: Some Leaves from Mali

**Abstract:** This study analyses five Bamana-language texts composed in the earlier twentieth century by Amadou Jomworo Bary, a Fulbe scholar from the Masina (Mali), that were hand copied in 1972 by the Fulbe scholar and researcher Almamy Maliki Yattara. The writing system, which uses modified Arabic characters to note phonemes specific to Bamana, is compared to other West African adaptations of Arabic script. The article also examines the doctrinal positions developed and world view implicit in the texts, which concern water rites in San (Mali), Islamic belief and practice, and healing. Attention is drawn as to how knowledge of local cultural contexts can contribute to a better understanding of these manuscripts.

## 1 Introduction

In 1994, I published a study of five short texts (totalling five and a half pages), written in Arabic characters in the Bamana language. These texts had been copied by Almamy Maliki Yattara, a Muslim scholar then employed by the Institut des Sciences Humaines in Bamako, from originals held by a friend of his, Aboubacar (commonly known as Bory) Bary, in 1972 in San (Mali). Research conducted in the intervening twenty years has confirmed the analysis of the writing system, and has led to few changes in the transliteration (Arabic to Latin characters), transcription (reconstitution of the Bamana discourse) and translations of these texts. On the other hand, personal fieldwork undertaken in the interval, as well as general progress in the understanding of West African writing practices, makes it possible to place these texts in much sharper historical and cultural perspective. In particular, one may now confirm that Amadou Jomworo Bary was the author of these texts, and provide further details of his life. These new data also suggest that the Fulbe scholar's decision to write in Bamana may have been inspired by the practice of writing Fulfulde in Arabic script, now better attested in Mali as well as in certain neighbouring countries, and by his familiarity with French.

My initial article was based on the texts themselves, the then-available documentation about African languages (especially Manding and Fulfulde) tran-

scribed in Arabic script, and interviews with Almamy Maliki Yattara and Sambourou Bary (a pupil of Almamy Maliki Yattara and son of Bory Bary) – only. In the intervening two decades, I have travelled to San, Sienso and Penga (places which Amadou Jomworo Bary had visited or in which he lived), and met numerous other members of the family, including Bory Bary and his eldest son Amadou Bary, another son – Kola Bary –, and a son-in-law – Amadou Cissé.<sup>1</sup>

The writing system devised by Amadou Jomworo Bary, seemingly labouring in isolation, for Bamana, is phonologically more perfect than that of most or all other West African *‘ajamī*-s currently identified – including several associated with extensive written literatures (such as Fulfulde and Hausa) – and several major Asian ones (including the ones employed for Persian and Turkish). I had for long mused as to why this might be so, when I was contacted by several family members, who stated that their elders had mentioned that Amadou Jomworo Bary not only spoke French, but could read it and write it. This circumstance may well explain why – rather than the three or at most four vowels distinguished by most *‘ajamī*-s – the author was careful to note five vocalic degrees for Bamana (which has seven vowel phonemes).

However, additional information also leads to new questions. Why did Amadou Jomworo Bary choose to write in Bamana, rather than Arabic, Fulfulde, or French? And why did he choose to describe the San ceremonies, rather than the equally spectacular water rites at Sienso, the nearby village where he occasionally resided?

It must be emphasised that the texts transmitted by Almamy Maliki Yattara are his handwritten copies. Several attempts to locate the originals, both during Bory Bary’s lifetime and afterwards, having now proved unsuccessful, it is to be

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<sup>1</sup> Almamy Maliki Yattara (c. 1922 – November 1998) was a highly respected, traditionally-trained, Fulfulde-speaking scholar (also fluent in Songhay, Tamashek, and Bamana, as well as Arabic), originally hailing from the Guimbala region of Mali (just north of the Masina). He collaborated with Amadou Hampâté Bâ, as well as with numerous Western scholars; his life history has now been published by Bernard Salvaing (Yattara/Salvaing 2000, 2003). Amadou Bary is his grandfather’s homonym. Bory, Amadou and Kola Bary were all educated at French-language government schools, then going on to the civil service or other modern sector employment. Sambourou Bary, now a teacher at a Franco-Arabic school in Bamako, received both traditional and modern Islamic schooling. Amadou Cissé, husband of Bory’s daughter Dikko, is a recently retired commercial traveller and accountant, who received both traditional Islamic and French-language education. Bory Bary is mentioned several times in Almamy’s memoirs (Yattara/Salvaing 2003, 37, 39–40, 43, 48, 57–59, 89, 92–93). I would like to thank the above, as well as members of the Tera and Traoré families in San, interlocutors in Penga and Sienso, and representatives of the association ‘Alliance Dofera ni Banabako de San’ in Bamako, for their welcome and information, as well as the article’s anonymous referees for their helpful comments.

feared that the original documents – which may once have been part of a larger corpus – are now irretrievably lost.

The researchers Gérard Dumestre and Valentin Vydrin have recently published (2014) a study of these same texts, which strangely makes no reference to my work and is, more importantly, marred by a considerable number of errors, affecting both the interpretation of the writing system and the meaning of the texts. In the several instances in which I have found their readings useful, this is explicitly indicated in the main body of this essay. It has, however, been necessary to devote a separate, final section to an analysis of the misinterpretations advanced by these two authors.

## 2 Manding and Malian ‘*ajamī*-s in historical context

While two West African languages – Fulfulde and Hausa – have developed substantial literatures, and Old Kanembu also has an extensive written corpus, the evidence for Manding is sketchier. Nearly all known examples of the latter group of languages in Arabic script concern varieties of Mandinka, in Senegal, The Gambia, and northern Guinea-Bissau, where their use in correspondence and personal record-keeping has been reported.<sup>2</sup> However, several historical manuscripts are known to exist, and two (written partly in Arabic and partly in Mandinka) have been published.<sup>3</sup> Considerable use of African languages (including Manding) in Arabic script has been reported in Sierra Leone<sup>4</sup>, while several Jula documents from the Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso have been described.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup> Hamlyn 1935, 101–106; Rowlands 1959, 1; Addis 1963; Schaffer 1975, 2003, 7–15; Giesing/Costa Dias, 2007; Giesing/Vydrine 2007; and (with reference to Bamana and Malinke in Mali) Binger 1886, 31–35. The oft-cited passages from Carreira 1947, 254 (with reference to Guinea-Bissau) and Bazin 1906a, 693, 1906b, xxiii (with reference to Bamana in Mali) are in fact ambiguous: it is unclear whether the authors are referring to the use of Arabic characters for the writing of Manding or Arabic.

<sup>3</sup> Schaffer 1975; 2003, 8–15; Vydrine 1998, 46–62; Giesing/Dias 2007, Giesing/Vydrine 2007. Camara 1996, 776–777, 1999, 64–66 reports that the Diabate griots of Kela, Mali (who serve the royal Keita lineage residing in Kangaba) claim to have a written version of the Sunjata story, but was unable to gain access to it.

<sup>4</sup> Skinner 1976, 503–505.

<sup>5</sup> Delafosse 1904, 259–261; Donaldson 2013.

documents studied here are the first Manding-language documents from Mali, and also the first in Bamana, to have been identified and published.

The first reference to a Manding '*ajamī*' seems to be that of Michel Jajolet de La Courbe, in his account of his travels, in 1685–1687, in Senegambia. After describing the Quranic schools in what may be identified as the Mandinka kingdom of Niumi, he affirms that 'there is hardly anyone among them who does not know how to write, and they also use the Arabic characters to write their own language'.<sup>6</sup> Robert Maxwell Macbrair, who in 1835–1836 visited several localities in what was to become The Gambia, mentioned what he regarded as personal jottings of Mandinka words in Arabic characters; he states that the writing system is defective and that each person can only understand his own notes or texts which have been read aloud to him.<sup>7</sup> The first description of this writing, by William Hamlyn, dates only from the 1930s, but that it is stated to be used by a large proportion of the population<sup>8</sup> suggests that it was a long-established as well as

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6 '[...] Il n'y en a guerre entre eux qui ne sachent écrire et les lettres arabesques leur servent aussi à écrire leur langue naturelle [...]', La Courbe in Cultru 1913, p. 191. The misclassified manuscript was belatedly discovered and published by Prosper Cultru. I was set on the trail of this reference by Cornelia Giesing's and Eduardo Costa Dias' quotation (2007, 63) from Jean-Baptiste Labat's *Nouvelle relation de l'Afrique occidentale*, 1728, vol. 4, 354. However, as Cultru demonstrated, Labat's work is a literary amplification of several, usually unacknowledged, written and oral sources – La Courbe's manuscript being the main one. In these sections, the differences between La Courbe's and Labat's accounts are due primarily (but not exclusively) to Labat's flights of fancy and florid style. Wright 1997 is a detailed history of Niumi (comprised in present-day Gambia).

7 Macbrair 1839, Appendix II: 'On the best method of disseminating the scriptures in North-western Africa', especially 320–321: 'It is also a custom with some of the people to write down in Arabic characters any thing that they wish to remember in Mandingo; and they have their own forms for this purpose. It is true that none but themselves can decipher what is thus written, without first hearing it read; but a little trouble might bring any convenient form into general use'. The better-known passage in Macbrair 1842, p. vi, is less affirmative: 'Many of the Mahometan aborigines are slightly acquainted with the Arabic letters, but this alphabet is very unsuitable for the expression of Mandingo...'. Macbrair (life dates: 1808–1874) went on to prepare an '*ajamī*' version of at least one gospel (Saint Mark's – finally published in 1904), as well as Latin-alphabet-based versions of the other three. Could any of his proposals for the improvement of Arabic writing as applied to Manding (see 1839, *ibid.*) have influenced the further development of '*ajamī*' in Senegambia? Although Macbrair's translations were prepared with the help of both native and non-native speakers of Mandinka, they are certainly an important document about that language as it was spoken in the 1830s, and would reward further study.

8 Hamlyn 1935, 101: 'Thus, though a fair number of men in every larger community can write Arabic more or less correctly, a still larger number can only write "salutations" and headings in Arabic – and employ Mandinka written in Arabic characters in the body of their compositions'. R.T. Addis, in 1963, 1, wrote: 'Very roughly a quarter of the population is now able to read and



socially significant practice. The history from Pakao, Senegal, appears to have been completed c. 1843.<sup>9</sup>

La Courbe's statement puts the age of Manding writing in Arabic script on a par with the earliest dates currently advanced for Fulfulde and Hausa, and the oldest surviving, dated documents in Old Kanembu; though the uses of writing are, in each case, partially different. The activities of the Old Mande Research Network have brought to light a considerable number of Soninke manuscripts, and a small number of Manding ones, mainly from the Senegambia region, and may push back the confirmed dating for these languages while providing evidence for greater diversity in the uses of writing.<sup>10</sup>

Data concerning the use of African languages in written composition in Mali remain limited, but increasingly, pertinent documents are coming to light. While written Fulfulde in Mali does not appear to have had the high status it enjoyed in Futa Jalon and in the Sokoto Caliphate, some poems in manuscript form have been identified.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, a preliminary examination of the documents conserved in Mali's manuscript libraries suggests that a significant amount of material, in all the principal languages of Islamic culture – especially but not limited to Fulfulde, Songhay, Tamashek, and Soninke – exists in the form of marginal and interlineal annotations. The position of Fulfulde is of particular relevance, since as shall be seen, the author of the Bamana texts to be examined here was of Fulbe

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write its own language in Arabic script to some degree'. Jan Knappert (1972) argued, on general historical grounds, that there have probably been attempts, over several centuries, at writing Manding in Arabic characters, predicting that pertinent documentary evidence might yet surface.

The contrast between the very high rate of literacy implied by La Courbe's account and the more moderate one indicated by later accounts, and more especially between the position of Islam as it appears in some early accounts and the non-Islamic character of Mandinka society depicted by oral traditions, poses an historical conundrum. Are these differences due to the sources' biases, to an intervening (partial) de-islamisation, or to differences in religious practice correlated to different social categories (with the rulers, in this instance, being non-Muslim)? Many southern Manding societies distinguish between a hereditary category of observant Muslims and others who may be less observant or non-Muslim (see more below, p. 255). Regarding the historical position of Islam in Mandinka-speaking societies of the Senegambia, see e.g. Niane 1989; Wright 1997 (especially 80–82, 104–105, 156–159).

<sup>9</sup> Schaffer 1975, 98–100.

<sup>10</sup> Founded at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, Hamburg University, in December 2012, and stemming from the insights of Nikolay Dobronravin (University of Saint Petersburg). Ogorodnikova 2016 is the first publication emanating from this research group.

<sup>11</sup> Seydou 2008, 221. This is in addition to poetry composed by Futa Toro authors temporarily stationed in what is now Mali: see Gaden 1935; Robinson 1982; Kane et al., 1994.

background. Wolof *‘ajamī* developed and expanded considerably in the twentieth century, due largely to its role as a vehicle for the Muridiyya Sufi order.<sup>12</sup> It shares many of its graphic features with Fulfulde.<sup>13</sup>

### 3 Author’s biography

Almamy’s handwritten copies of the Bamana texts were accompanied by several notes, written by him in French, explaining their provenance. These include statements about the identities of the author and the owner of the manuscripts, as well as the alleged date and reasons for composition. Both Almamy, with whom I discussed these texts in Bamako in 1992, and Bory Bary, whom I first met in San in 1998, confirmed that the latter was the source of information for these notes.

Almamy’s French notes clearly imply that a certain ‘Amadou Bary’ was the author of the texts.<sup>14</sup> However, when I discussed them with him in 1992, Almamy

<sup>12</sup> See especially Camara 1997, Lüpke/Bao-Diop 2014, Ngom 2016.

<sup>13</sup> See more below. That the vocabulary of *wann*, a branch of advanced Quranic studies intended to facilitate memorisation, is largely of Fulfulde origin (Ndiaye 1985, 48–52) suggests that most influences flowed from Fulfulde to Wolof (rather than vice-versa).

<sup>14</sup> 1° Le détenteur du document ‘Karantela kolonba, le puits sacré de San’ Bory Bary, écrit par son père en caractères arabes à San pour lui en 1911 à San. Le copiste Almamy Malick Yattara à San en 1972. 2° Le détenteur du document de ‘Janaba koli’, le même Bory Bary hérité de son père qui écrit pour enseigner les Bambara en religion. Le copiste Almamy Malick Yattara. 3° Le détenteur du document ‘Kalan bi damine ni Ala togo ye’, Bory Bary hérité de son père le même Amadou Bory qui écrit pour enseigner les Bambara. Le copiste Almamy Malick Yattara à San en 1972. 4° Le détenteur du document ‘Médicament pour la hernie qu’on appelle “Kokili fura”’, le même Bory Bary écrit par son père Amadou Bary marabout. Le copiste Almamy Malick Yattara en 1972 à San. 5° Le détenteur du document ‘Kilisi fura’, toujours Bory Bary. Trouvé dans les affaires de son père, Amadou Bary le marabout. Copié par Almamy Malick Yattara à San en 1972 à San.

(Corrected spelling. For the original spelling, see the photographic reproduction of this document, below. The uncorrected spelling is also reproduced in Vydrin and Dumestre 2014, 232, notes 8, 9, 236 note 10, 237 note 12, 240 note 14, 242 note 16.)

Almamy learnt the Latin alphabet while briefly attending a French-language government school to which he had been recruited against his own and his family’s wishes, then as an adult in evening classes in Mopti (Yattara/Salvaing 2000, 107, 194–196). He honed his skills with Christiane Seydou, who instructed him in Fulfulde transliteration when they first began carrying out field research on oral literature together, in 1970.

English translation: 1° The owner of the document ‘Karantela kolonba, the sacred well of San’, Bory Bary. Written by his father in Arabic characters, in San for him[self?] in 1911. The copyist

was not so sure; he suggested that Amadou Bary may have merely copied or collected the texts. However, Bory Bary, both in 1998 and on several subsequent occasions, confirmed that his father had written the texts.

This claim is supported by additional evidence. Bory Bary confirms that his father spoke Bamana. Furthermore, the texts include several locutions that suggest they were written by a non-native speaker. In two instances, the relationship between a living being and a part of its body is indicated by the particle *ka* (which normally marks alienable possession) rather than by the zero marker, indicating inalienable possession. Thus, text II, line 10, reads *i k tonna*, which I interpret as *i ka tɔn na* ('the nape of your neck'), whereas a more typical formulation, by a native speaker, would be simply *i tɔn na*. Similarly, an invocation addressed to a tree reads *mīn bīi ka bulūwla* (V.7), that is *mīn b'i ka buluw la* ('which are in your leaves'), whereas a native speaker would typically say *i buluw*. Furthermore, the name of San's famous, permanent-water lake is given as *Sankeer(e)* (I.11 and I.13), whereas its name is normally pronounced *Sanke* or *Sange* by the Bamana-speaking inhabitants of San. Since *-re* is the Fulfulde locative suffix, this specifically suggests that the writer was a Fulfulde-speaker. There are two other atypical formulations in these texts (III.7, IV.4 – see more below), but in these instances, it is difficult to know whether one is dealing with unidiomatic expression by a non-native speaker, errors by the copyist, or even language change. Thus, there is no longer any reason to doubt that Amadou Bary, father of Bory, was the author of these texts.

The other major piece of information contained in Almamy's notes concerns the date of composition of these texts – indicated as the year '1911'. When I met them, neither Almamy nor Bory Bary could explain this date, which was presumably based either on a note associated with the texts (but then, why wasn't it copied?), or on that of another document found near them, or on oral information transmitted by Bory Bary. The precision of this date contrasts awkwardly with the

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Almamy Malick Yattara in San in 1972. 2° The owner of the document 'Janaba koli', the same Bory Bary. Inherited from his father, who wrote in order to instruct the Bamana in religion. The copyist Almamy Malick Yattara. 3° The owner of the document 'Kalan bi damine ni Ala togo ye', Bory Bary. Inherited from his father, the same Amadou Bary, who wrote in order to instruct the Bamana. The copyist Almamy Malick Yattara in San in 1972. 4° The owner of the document 'Remedy for the hernia called "Kokili fura"', the same Bory Bary. Written by his father Amadou Bary, a marabout. The copyist Almamy Malick Yattara in 1972 in San. 5° The owner of the document 'Kilisi fura', again Bory Bary. Found among the belongings of his father, Amadou Bary the marabout. Copied by Almamy Malick Yattara in San in 1972.

otherwise limited information Almamy and Bory possessed about these manuscripts, whom the latter found by rummaging through his father's belongings.<sup>15</sup> It is also curious that – if written by Bory's father – this date would have been expressed in the Gregorian calendar only (omitting the hijri year). The texts themselves, as copied, include no internal chronological indications. For all these reasons, the date of these texts cannot be regarded as certain. It should be remarked that, if the date is accurate, then Amadou Bary would have been a very young man at the time he composed them (see more below).

The first note, to the effect that Amadou Bary wrote the text 'for him[self]', is probably a calque of the Arabic *katabahu li-nafsihi* '[the author or copyist] wrote it for himself', very frequent in West African and other colophons. The grammatically imperfect French is ambiguous, but if the date of composition, given as 1911, is even approximately correct, then one may exclude the possibility that the father wrote it for his son.

From interviews over the years – with his son, grandsons, and Almamy – the following synthesis may be offered concerning Amadou Bary's life and activities.

His full name was Amadou Jomworo Bary. *Jomworo*, a title encountered among the Fulbe of the Masina, signifying 'master of the pastures', implies certain supervisory responsibilities vis-à-vis all Fulbe herders in a given area, and is usually inherited.

Amadou Jomworo Bary<sup>16</sup> was born in the Masina, to a family established in Penga, a large village situated on an affluent of the Bani River; the village serves as a port to the ancient city of Dia. He received his education in the Masina. As an adult, he made regular trips between Penga and the San area, living intermittently in Sienso, a mixed Bwa (Bobo) and Fulbe village located about 8 km south of San.<sup>17</sup> Considered a 'marabout' (*mori*) or religious specialist, he was primarily

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<sup>15</sup> 'trouvé dans les affaires de son père'.

<sup>16</sup> Although the title *Jomworo* would only have been attributed in adulthood, it will be henceforth included in all references to this scholar, in order to obviate confusion with his grandson. The institution of *jomworo* is analysed in Gallais 1984, 197–207.

<sup>17</sup> In conformity with scholarly usage (both Malian and international), the term 'Bwa' will henceforth be used to refer to the Bomu-speaking communities of Mali and Burkina Faso. The term 'Bobo' is far more common in Malian spoken French, but could lead to confusion with the culturally related Bobo of Burkina Faso (who, however, speak a Mande rather than a Voltaic language). Major ethnographic studies of the Bwa include Capron 1957 (specifically with reference to the San area) and 1973, Diarra 2007, and (with particular attention to water rites) Kamaté 2011. Nazi Boni's famous novel, *Crépuscule des temps anciens* (1962), which is based largely on oral traditions, portrays the Bwa of Burkina Faso in the late precolonial period, while Karaba Traoré's 2015 novel depicts the Bwa of the Kôdou, an area adjoining San and situated in Mali, in the twentieth century.

known for his skills in the esoteric sciences, helping those who sought him out. He also visited non-Muslim areas, in order to persuade persons there of the truth of Islam (and thus engaged in what were in effect missionising tours). It is these conversion tours which are alluded to in Almamy's French notes to the effect that Amadou Bary wrote 'in order to instruct the Bambara in religion'. In this context, the term 'Bambara' should probably be understood in both of its most frequent meanings: Bamana-speaking, and non-Muslim.<sup>18</sup> Though he did not run a Quranic school, he is said to have had several older, seasonal pupils. Almamy, in our conversations, described him as a 'vrai marabout' ('true marabout'), in order to emphasise that he was primarily concerned with esoteric healing and assistance, rather than teaching.<sup>19</sup>

Whereas Almamy stressed that Amadou Jomworo Bary had engaged in extended Quranic study, his descendants claim that he had also studied 'books', i.e., engaged in the post-Quranic study of the various Islamic disciplines, such as *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *tawhīd* (theology). Their view receives some support from the presence of the non-Quranic term *ay* ('that is') in one of the texts (I, line 12); this term is recurrent in academic treatises and teaching manuals.

Amadou Jomworo Bary married Aissatou Cissé, a Fulbe woman from a nomadic family of the Masina. The couple had three sons – Kolado, Aboubacar called Bory, and Mody; there was an age difference of about two to three years between successive siblings. Kolado inherited his father's title 'Jomworo'. Based in Penga, he engaged in commerce, for which he travelled considerably, as well as in herding and farming. The second son was forcibly placed in school, in the city of Dia, by the French colonial government. As an adult, he was successively employed in several higher-level clerical positions, initially in the public and later in the private sectors. The third son, Mody, became a well-known religious

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**18** See Bazin 1985. The third meaning, a Minianka-speaker or member of the Minianka people, whose autonym is *Bamanan*, is less pertinent, though some Minianka are also present in the area. The area surrounding San includes many Bamana- and Bomu- (Bwa-) speakers who, until recently, did not identify as Muslim. There is no evidence, however, that Amadou Jomworo Bary was familiar with the Bomu language. Manding-speaking lineages that have long been Muslim self-identify as 'Jula' or 'Marka'. See more below.

**19** While the term 'marabout', which is etymologically related to *al-murābiṭūn* – the designation for the eleventh- and twelfth-century Almoravid movement –, may have acquired derogatory connotations in English, this is not the case in French. The term *mrābiṭ* is employed, in both spoken and written Maghrebi Arabic discourse, to designate Muslim men of letters, of higher as well as of lesser attainments, including those with professorial as well as esoteric pursuits. The term 'marabout', in North and West African French, is a respectful designation, with a similarly broad range of meanings.

scholar. Literally following in his father's footsteps, he often travelled between Penga, San and Sienso. While highly regarded for his skills and success in the esoteric domain – he aided several well-known Malian public figures – he also had numerous students, who accompanied him in his travels.

A grandson, Kola (son of Bory Bary), remembers that according to his grandmother, Aissatou Cissé, his grandfather effectively exercised the role of *jomworo* of Penga – and correlatively, of village chief recognised by the French colonial administration. Furthermore, he states that his grandmother often used to recount how, during a food shortage related to the war effort in the early 1940s, Amadou Jomworo Bary distributed some of the administration's grain reserves (stored in the port of Penga) to the village's inhabitants.

Amadou Cissé, husband of Amadou Jomworo Bary's granddaughter Dikko, recalls how his own father, Oumar Cissé, a commercial representative for a French company, told him about an encounter in Sofara (a small town about 50 km south of Mopti) shortly after the Second World War: Amadou Jomworo Bary – who also engaged in some trade – was in discussion with several Frenchmen, in French. Amadou Cissé adds that according to his father Oumar, Amadou Jomworo Bary could also read and write French.<sup>20</sup>

Amadou Cissé was not told how Amadou Jomworo Bary learned (or learned about) written French. However, I have been told about some persons from the San area who, in the first third of the twentieth century, learnt French at evening schools.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, I have met, over the past three decades, several Islamic scholars who have taught themselves French (sometimes using Arabic textbooks); the motivation may have been even greater in the colonial period. In addition, it should be noted that many Malian Islamic scholars who do not understand French are nevertheless aware of the structure of its alphabet (five vowels written on the line, in the same way as the consonants).<sup>22</sup>

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**20** Like the Bary family, the Cissé family originated in the Masina area, with links to Penga. Oumar Cissé completed the government school in Mopti; he had a solid knowledge of arithmetic (necessary for his work) and wrote perfect, elegant French (as I can affirm, having examined some of his letters, preserved and shown to me by his son). Oumar Cissé passed away in 1979, at the age of about 65.

**21** The important issue of evening classes (and other forms of educational outreach to adults) in the colonial period has hardly been studied; nevertheless, Denise Bouche mentions them in her comprehensive work on the history of education in early colonial French West Africa (1974, vol. 2, 576–579). Ahmadou Kourouma mentions literacy courses for adults, in early colonial Ivory Coast, in his novel, *Monnè, outrages et défis* (1990; 67, 231–232).

**22** Almamy himself exemplifies the interest of some traditionally-trained Muslim scholars in the French language, as well as the role of evening courses. As he describes it, even before learning

Amadou Jomworo Bary died at an advanced age in the early 1960s, and is buried in Penga. His wife, who spent her final years in her second son's household, passed away at a very advanced age, c. 1991, and is buried in San. Bory Bary (1924–2008), who outlived his brothers by a considerable margin, is also buried in San. Jomworo Kolado passed away c. 1986 and is buried in Penga, whereas Mody died prematurely c. 1975 and is buried in Mopti. Amadou Jomworo Bary's descendants are currently established in Penga, Tenenkou, Markala, Dioro, San, Koutiala, and of course, Bamako.

As first marriage for men, among Fulbe families of the Masina, traditionally took place between the ages of about twenty and thirty (more usually towards the earlier pole), Amadou Jomworo Bary may have been born about 1890–1900.

The village of Penga is peopled by Bozo, who specialise in fishing and are considered the earliest inhabitants, and, since at least the nineteenth century, by Fulbe who specialise in herding (though both groups farm); in recent decades, the village has also become home to some Tamashek-speaking camel-herders. Though at present, the Bozo in Penga and environs often speak Bamana, only a very few Fulbe speak it.<sup>23</sup> It may be surmised that Amadou Jomworo Bary acquired Bamana during his travels – first perhaps in the Masina (which includes some Bamana-speaking communities), then in the San area.

Sienso is comprised of two distinct neighbourhoods: one Bwa, the other Fulbe, each with its own chief. Both chiefs are recognised by the Malian administration. The Bwa settlement is reputed to be ancient. The Fulbe, on the other

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how to write this language, he would ask acquaintances for the French equivalents of Fulfulde words. See Yattara/Salvaing 2000, 196, and above, note 14.

**23** Bozo-Fulbe relations in the Masina, and in the village of Penga in particular, have been studied in a remarkable article, based largely on oral traditions, by Claude Fay (1995). Amadou Hampâté Bâ's and Jacques Daget's collection of oral traditions (1984, first ed.: 1955) remains a major primary source for the political and religious history of the Masina, including Dia. Gallais 1984, 17–39, and in more detail, Gallais 1967, analyse the peopling of the Masina and, to some extent, also of the San area. Bedaux et al. present documentary and archaeological evidence concerning Dia's early history. Kamian (1957, 1959) presents a synthesis concerning the early history of San, as well as a detailed study of the city in colonial times. Massing 2009 presents some complementary historical and sociological data, while Schulz 2012 studies recent developments among the Muslims of San. The photographs presented here illustrate the sacred sites of San that are a focus of Text I. Méniaud 1931, vol. 2, 384 shows a drawing of San's first Friday mosque, as it appeared in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century; Schamir 1970 presents photos of San's second Friday mosque, which replaced it on the same site in 1941. Amadou Jomworo Bary would have been familiar with both structures. Images of the present Friday mosque, built in 2001, are available on [www.festivalsanke.fr.gd](http://www.festivalsanke.fr.gd). The sacred well adjoins both the ancestral compound of the Traores and the Friday mosque.

hand, emigrated from the Masina in several waves, beginning over two hundred years ago; they progressively adopted the Bamana language – none of the inhabitants, even the oldest ones, remember a time when Fulfulde was spoken in the village, or can speak it themselves. Whereas the Fulbe claim they were Muslim at the time of their installation at Sienso, the Bwa remain faithful to their traditional religion, and have complex water rites, centred like those of San, on a sacred well and a sacred lake.<sup>24</sup>

It is possible that the Bamana spoken by the Fulbe inhabitants of Sienso, in the early to mid-twentieth century, was still influenced by the particularities of the Fulfulde language, and that this in turn impacted Amadou Jomworo Bary's perception of Bamana – since Sienso was surely one of the places in which he learned or practiced this language.

Amadou Jomworo Bary's travels between Penga and San appear, thus, to have been part of a wider pattern of interregional contacts. Transhumancy patterns have long brought Fulbe herders to the San area, while commercial canoes regularly plied the Bani River, linking the two cities.

## 4 The Writing system

### 4.1 Phonology, the alphabet and diacritics

The writing system employed in these Bamana texts is more complete, accurate, economical, coherent and consistent than any other Manding '*ajamī*' known so far. Indeed, in these respects, it is superior to many or most West African '*ajamī*'-s – though some of these have served as vehicles for substantial literatures.

Whereas Arabic (and its writing system) distinguish only three phonemic vowels, Bamana distinguishes seven. These texts successfully represent five vocalic degrees. The standard Arabic diacritics *fatḥa* (َ), *kasra* (ِ) and *ḍamma* (ُ) are used to represent the short vowels *a*, *i*, *u*. A dot beneath a consonant sign (ـِ) is used to represent both *e* and *ε*, while a special sign (an inverted *ḍamma* – ٓ – the concave body faces right instead of left) is used to represent both *o* and *ɔ*. As in Arabic, diacritics may be placed either above (*fatḥa*, *ḍamma*; and by extension, the sign for inverted *ḍamma*) or below (*kasra*; the dot standing

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<sup>24</sup> René Caillié visited Sienso in March 1828, on his way to Djenné; see Caillié 1996, vol. 2, 123–124 (first ed.: 1830) and also the commentary by Pierre Viguier (2008, 70–72). The event is commemorated by a signpost at the entrance of the village. Sienso is furthermore mentioned by Kamian 1957, chapter 2; Traoré 1970, 35, 41; Fabé/Dakouo 1978, 16, 34–43.



for *e* and *ε*) a consonant that is effectively pronounced, or alternatively, one that merely serves as a graphic support (as with *alif* and/or *hamza*).

Building upon Arabic usage, the semi-consonants *alif* (ا), *wāw* (و) and *yā'* (ي) are used as 'letters of prolongation' (*ḥurūf al-madd*) to represent the long vowel sounds and diphthongs. In addition to the standard *ā*, *ī* and *ū* (noted by doubling – *aa*, *ii*, *uu* – in the official orthographies of Bamana and most other African languages), the sounds *ee/εε* and *oo/ɔɔ* are represented (first occurrences I.4 and I.8 respectively). Moreover, in addition to *aw* and *ay*, which occur in some pronunciations of literary Arabic, the diphthongs *ow/ɔw* are represented. In just one instance (V.9, second script unit; but is this a copyist's error?), *yā'* rather than (as one would expect, based on spelling practice evidenced elsewhere in the text) *wāw* is used to prolong *o/ɔ*. In two instances (IV.9 and 10), *kasra* is prolonged by the letter *yā'*, repeated twice.

In eleven instances (I.3, 23, 24; III.12, 13 – two occurrences, 16; IV.8, 11, 16, 17), in a usage again inspired by standard Arabic orthography, *ʿ alif maqṣūra* (undotted *yā'*, occurring as the last character of a word, and corresponding to the phonetic value *ā*) is used to denote *a* or *aa*. In just one instance (II.14, third script unit), *alif maqṣūra*, following *fathā* and the *alif* of prolongation, may indicate that the writer wished to mark what he perceived as an especially long vowel. In another instance (I.18, second-last script unit), what appears to be superscript *alif* <sup>ʿ</sup> (*alif khanjariyya*) seems to be used to represent the long vowel *ā*; or perhaps – following as it does the dot representing *e/ε* and written on top of *yā'* – this is an attempt to represent *ε* or *εε*, i.e. a sound intermediate between *e* and *a*, in what would be the unique attempt, in the five texts, to represent this vowel sound. However, in contemporary usage in San, this family name is pronounced with a closed, rather than an open, vowel.

These texts also provide examples of two contiguous short vowels within a single script unit (III.13 – 2 occurrences). In both cases, they correspond to what contemporary linguists analyse, and the official Latin-based orthography represents, as a two-word sequence; and in both also, the second vowel – characteristically written as *alif* bearing *hamzat al-qat'* (see more below) corresponds to the second person singular pronoun *i*.

As Bamana (unlike certain other Manding languages) has few phonological long vowels<sup>25</sup>, most representations of vocalic length correspond to words that may be contextually pronounced with a long vowel (often corresponding to the historical or dialectal suppression of a consonant) and (far more frequently) to contextual elision in the word sequence. However, in many instances, graphic representation

25 See, e.g., Bird 1982; Derive 1990.

of vowel length does not correspond to any phonetic trait of Bamana discourse, and one must suspect the visual influence of the Arabic graphic page (characterised by a high proportion of long vowels). Exceptionally, vowels that are regularly pronounced long are represented as short. This is especially the case of *bεε* ('all'), which is consistently spelled short (I.1, V.5, V.9, and possibly II.9).<sup>26</sup>

Nasalisation is generally represented by the letter *Ṣ nūn*, *n*, surmounted by *sukūn* (see more below). In just two cases, it is represented by *tanwīn* (which, in Arabic, is indicative not only of sound, but of certain grammatical functions; employed, here as in Arabic, in final position only): IV.4 *mūgān* (or possibly *mūgan*, since the *alif* preceding *tanwīn* in the *naṣb* (accusative) case may be purely orthographic) and V.5 *banabātonin*. The first term is spelt quite differently – with two short vowels – later in the same text (IV.12, *muga*).

The personal pronouns are generally written above or below *alif* bearing *hamzat al-qaṭʿ*, followed when necessary by a letter of prolongation or a *nūn* marking nasalisation: *i*, second person singular; *e*, emphatic form of the second person singular; *a*, third person singular; *an*, first person plural; *aw*, corresponding to the second person plural *aw*, or possibly to *anw*, the emphatic form of the first person plural; *a*, abridged form of the second person plural, often used in salutations; *u*, third person plural. (First occurrences, respectively: II.2; I.20 – 2 x; I.4; II.15; first and only occurrence, I.3; first and only occurrence, I.20; I.4.)

Thirteen letters are used to represent Bamana consonants whose pronunciation is close to that of the Arabic ones: *ب* *bāʿ*, *b*; *ج* *jīm*, *j*; *د* *dāl*, *d*; *ر* *rāʿ*, *r*; *س* *sīn*, *s*; *ف* *fāʿ*, *f* (Maghrebi script, with the dot under the letter); *ك* *kāf*, *k*; *ل* *lām*, *l*; *م* *mīm*, *m*; *ن* *nūn*, *n* (also used, following a vowel, to indicate nasalisation); *ه* *hāʿ*, *h*; *و* *wāw*, *w*; and *ي* *yāʿ*, *y*.

Three special signs are used to represent consonants found in Bamana but not Arabic: *ك̣* *kāf* surmounted by a dot, for the voiced velar plosive *g*; *ن̣* combined *nūn* and *yāʿ* – i.e. *nūn* to which have been added the two dots, below the line, characteristic of *yāʿ* – for the palatal nasal *ŋ*; *ق̣*, corresponding to the general form of *fāʿ* or *qāf*, surmounted by two dots (and thus identical to Oriental *qāf*) for the velar palatal *ŋ*. The first two signs occur frequently in these texts (first occurrences: respectively I.2 and I.12). The last-mentioned sign, which corresponds to a phoneme with low frequency in Bamana, occurs just once (III.15).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Readings of I.1 and II.9 as *bεε* are due to Vydrin/Dumestre 2014, 232, 237. See more below.

<sup>27</sup> True, this sign appears in a word that would ordinarily be pronounced *kɔŋɡɔ* (*ŋɡ* sequence), but the fact that the writer used a single letter suggests that he perceived the sound as a single phoneme (i.e., *ŋ*).

Only one Arabic consonant sign is used equivocally to render two distinct Bamana phonemes: thus, ت *tā'*, *t* serves to render both the unvoiced dental plosive /t/ and the unvoiced palatal plosive /c/ (i.e., /tʃ/). (First occurrence with the latter value, for this rather common phoneme: I.14.)

Three Arabic consonant signs occur exclusively in items of the religious vocabulary drawn from Arabic. These are: ح *ḥā'*, *ḥ* in the Prophet's name *Muḥammad* (spelled exactly as in Arabic); ص *ṣād*, *ṣ* and ز *zāy*, *z* in loanwords from Arabic (all in text III).

A total of five words, whose spelling is identical to the Arabic, appear in these texts: *Allāh* (17 occurrences: II. 14, 15; III.1: 2 x, III.4: 2 x, III.8, III.11, 12 – 2 x, 13 – 2 x, 14, 17, 18; IV.14 and 16), *Muḥammad* (3 occurrences: III.2, 4 and 8), and one occurrence each: *āmīn* (II. 15), *tammāt* (V.16), and *ay* (I.12). In the case of the first three words, the preservation of Arabic spelling may be a means of showing respect for God and His Prophet, and demarcating the religious sphere. Additionally, it may indicate that the writer wished these words to be uttered with Arabic, or close to Arabic, pronunciation. The fourth and fifth words are used for their Arabic meaning-values – one being immediately followed by its Bamana translation (V.17), the other expressing content not conveyed in Bamana – and must therefore be viewed as Arabic words employed within a Bamana-language discourse.

The unvoiced labial plosive /p/, absent in Arabic and relatively infrequent in Bamana, does not appear in these texts.

The following two Arabic graphic signs also occur in the San texts: *sukūn* (◌ْ), which in Arabic indicates a vowel-less consonant (numerous occurrences, beginning with I.1), and *shadda* or *tashdīd* (◌ّ), which in Arabic indicates a geminated consonant.

Bamana syllables being typically open (CV or CV<sup>n</sup>), it is no surprise that *sukūn* is generally placed above *nūn* to indicate a nasalised vowel (first occurrence, I.1, *Karantela*), or above *mīm*, to indicate a nasal partially assimilated to the following labial consonant. There are 6 examples of the latter usage: I.1, 6, 20, *kolombā*; IV.6 *Tumbutu*; IV.15 *amba*; and V.7 *mbideli*. This last term – with the *sukūn* placed atop the first letter of the word, in order to represent two consonants pronounced in rapid succession – is, of course, most peculiar from the point of view of Arabic orthography. In nearly all the remaining instances, it is placed above the word-final plural marker -w, pronounced as a semi-vowel (first occurrences: I.3 – 2 x). There is also one example of *sukūn* used to mark the close of a syllable ending in a diphthong (III.9 *alkiyawma*).

The *shadda* occurs 9 times in these texts. Two examples, both in III.9, concern Arabic loanwords: *aljanna*, from Arabic *al-janna*, 'Paradise', and *jahannama*, from Arabic *jahannam* 'Gehenna, Hell'. Here the use of *shadda* may have been motivated

by a desire to underscore the etymological connection and/or suggest Arabic-like pronunciation. In three instances (I.16 *dimissaw*; I.21 *musso*; IV.11 *musso*), the *shadda* may reflect the writer's perception that these sibilants are stressed or doubled. Though Bamana (unlike Soninke, for example) does not make a phonological distinction between simple and geminated consonants, many persons learning to write using the official Bamana Latin-based alphabet double certain consonants – perhaps, especially, sibilants.<sup>28</sup> In the remaining four instances, the *shadda* corresponds to a sequence involving a lexeme with a final nasalised vowel followed by a morpheme with an initial nasal. In three instances, this morpheme is the Bamana locative particle *na* (II.10 *toma* for *tɔn na*; IV.12 *nogonnā* for *nɔgɔn na*; V.14 *sedanna* for *se dan na*); in one instance, it is the postposition *ma* (I.25 *kolonnā* for *kɔlɔn ma*).

However, not all repeated or geminated consonants are represented as such in these texts. Thus, in the following examples, which concern verbs terminating with the past perfect marker *-na*, *bāna* corresponds to *banna* (I.26, IV.19 and V.17), while *sonā* corresponds to *sɔnna* (IV.6).

Although at least two of the Arabic loanwords that appear in these texts correspond to terms that, in the original Arabic, are written with ʾ *tā'* *marbūʿa* (*zakā*, *janna*), this character is never used here – perhaps because of its semantic and morphological functions. Though in both Classical and Modern Literary Arabic the pronunciation of this letter depends on the syntactic context, in Arabic as it has traditionally been read and recited in West Africa, the consonant *t* and accompanying vowel are always enunciated.

The author's spelling practices clearly manifest his intention of writing Bamana, not Arabic. Only three key religious terms, and two terms used for their Arabic meanings, retain Arabic spelling. In the cases of *ṣalīla* and *zakā* (III.1 and 5), the assimilation to Arabic concerns the initial phonemes only; the first term is even associated to a Bamana morpheme (the perfective suffix *-la*). Notation of the initial phoneme as *ṣ* also helps differentiate it from the more fully integrated Arabic loanword *salilā* (III.5, corresponding to *salī* [or *səlī*] *la*, 'praying', the first element being similarly derived from the Arabic root *ṣlw*, 'to pray'). The great majority of Arabic loanwords present in the text are spelled in a way fully consistent with ordinary Bamana pronunciation.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> The above remarks, based on my personal experience, apply to persons trained in French or Arabic, as well as to those learning to write for the first time. Dumestre 1978 discusses the spelling of persons beginning to write in Bamana.

<sup>29</sup> The issue of Arabic loanwords in Bamana has been well discussed recently by Francesco Zappa 2011.

To summarise: 18 out of Bamana's 19 consonant phonemes occur in these texts, represented by 17 consonant signs. Thus, all but 2 phonemes are unequivocally represented by a specific alphabetic character. Of these 17 signs, 14 are standard in Arabic, while 3 are peculiar to these (and possibly other '*ajamī*') texts. Of the 29 characters of the Arabic alphabet (including *hamza*), 17 (including *alif* and *hamza*) are used to represent Bamana sounds. An additional 3 are used to represent Arabic or Arabic-like sounds. 9 Arabic letters are not used.

As with other African '*ajamī*' scripts, with the partial exception of Old Kanembu<sup>30</sup>, this one does not represent tone.

A word about calligraphy may also be in order. The basic style is, of course – as with nearly all handwriting in Mali until recently – Maghrebi, as seen notably in the representation of *fā'* and *qāf*. Almamy remembers the original manuscripts to have been very carefully and elegantly written – and regrets (as he himself recognises) his own irregular and somewhat angular handwriting. It is unclear whether the very large *dāl* that figure recurrently in these texts were a feature of the original manuscripts, or are due to Almamy. However, they are currently considered, by traditionally-trained Malian scholars, as characteristic of well-written older texts. The large *hamza*, written directly on the line, is, as is well-known, a characteristic feature of many West African calligraphies.

The above information is summarised in the following tables.

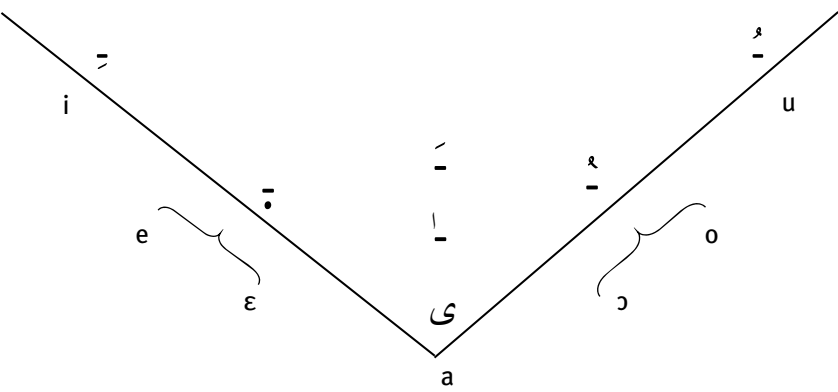
**Tab. 1:** Notation of Bamana consonants and semi-vowels<sup>31</sup>

	labial		dental		palatal		velar	post-velar	
Plosives									
unvoiced			t	ت	c [=tʃ]	ت	k	ك	
voiced	b	ب	d	د	j	ج	g	گ	
Fricatives	f	ف	s	س				h	ه
Nasals	m	م	n	ن	ɲ	ڨ	ŋ	ق	
Lateral			l	ل					
Trill			r	ر					
Semi-vowels	w	و			y	ي			

<sup>30</sup> Bondarev 2014, 114–117. See more below, p. 261.

<sup>31</sup> This presentation of Bamana phonology is based on Bailleul 2007, 4–7.

Tab. 2: Notation of Bamana vowels



Tab. 3: Letters used exclusively for the representation of Arabic consonant sounds

ḥ	ح
ṣ	ص
z	ز

Tab. 4: Additional signs

Tanwīn:

an    َ  
in    ِ

Sukūn:

(indicates syllabic closure):    ْ

## 4.2 Script units and word segmentation

The nature of the Arabic script is such that, in the absence of a standardised orthography, which exists for only a few languages, one cannot always determine the frontiers of a script word on visual evidence alone. Nevertheless, the San texts clearly include a large number of script units that associate one or more lexemes, or a lexeme and a morpheme. Yet, the San scholar’s writing is more analytic than

that of most Manding *‘ajamī* authors and beginner users of the official Latin-based orthography.

The following illustrates some of the principal types of complex script words encountered. In most but not all cases, these graphic linkages concern elements that are, grammatically and/or semantically, very closely associated.

- Positive predicate marker + verb root: e.g., I.5 *bisā* for *bi sa*, I.7 *bitā* for *bi taa*, I.9 *bifolo* for *bi fɔlɔ*.
- Positive predicate marker + derived verb: e.g., I.15 *bigeleyā* for *bi geleya*, *bitāyā* for *bi caya*.
- Negative predicate marker + verbal root: e.g. I.9 *make* for *ma ke*, *tesoro* for *tɛ sɔɔ*.
- Compound noun + predicate marker *don*: III.4 *tīdendo* for *ciden don*.
- *Ka* (infinitive marker) + compound verb: e.g., I.10 *katulonge* for *ka tulonke*.
- *Ka* (coordination marker, introducing a clause): followed by a noun: e.g. I.2. *kakolon* for *ka kɔlɔn (sɔɔ yan)*; followed by a pronoun: e.g. I.4. *kā* for *k’a (lajɛ)*.
- The identity markers *ye ... ye*, associated to a following or preceding noun: e.g., I.18 *yētaraworew* and *yēmoriw* (in each case, it is visually unclear whether the following *ye* is also attached); I.20 *dugulenyē* for *dugulen ye*, I.21 *jatigiye* for *jatigi ye*.
- Verb + direct object, e.g. V.9 *bulukari* for *bulu kari*, ‘break off, i.e. pick, leaves’.
- Noun followed by a qualifier: e.g. V.11 *siɲesegi* for *siɲɛ segin*, V.11 *tilesegi* for *tile segin*.
- Verb followed by a qualifier: e.g., V.12 *muɲudowonī* for *muɲu dɔɔnin*.
- Noun + relative marker: e.g. I.2 *tumamin* for *tuma min*.
- Relative marker + verb: e.g. I.12 *minkēra* for *min kera* (affirmative perfect form of the verb *ke*, ‘to do’).
- Conjunction + noun: e.g. I.4 *nifulaw* for *ni Fulaw*, ‘if/when the Fulbe’.
- Conjunction + pronoun: e.g. I.5 *nā* for *n’a (ni + a; 2 occurrences in the same line)*.
- Noun + postposition: e.g. I.22 *tilebifē* for *tilebin fe*, I.24 *sokono* for *so kɔɔ*.

A smaller number of sequences include three or more elements. Again, these may be of several different types, including:

- Verb phrases: e.g., III.3 *ksereyāke* for *ka seereya ke*, ‘to bear witness’.
- Circumstantial clauses: e.g. I.7 *sanwowsan* corresponding to *san wo san*, ‘every year’.

- Complex clauses, e.g.: I.15 *kelebike* for *kēlē bi kē*: noun subject + (positive) predicate marker + verb, ‘there will be war/conflict’; V.7 *mbīdeli* for *n b’i deli*, ‘I beg you’, pronominal subject + (positive) predicate marker + pronominal object + verb.

Several longer sequences do not appear to correspond to self-contained syntactic or semantic units; though this may be, in some instances, an (optical!) illusion due to the irregular spacing of words and letters. These include:

- I.4 *bufiyē* for *b’u fiyen* (*bi u fiyen*).
- I.23 *kasiginā* for *ka segin n’a*.
- I.26 *tibinimā* for *ti ben ni maa*.
- III.6 *nisebā* for *ni se b’a*.
- V.10 *bitanā* for *bi taa ni a*.
- V.13 *bifolotake* for *bi fōlō ta kē*.
- V.14 *sedānnā* for *se dan na*.

Although Arabic writing practices<sup>32</sup>, as well as the visual norms of the Arabic page, might appear to strongly discourage the representation of words as single, isolated letters, this is precisely what the writer has done in a significant number of cases. In addition to the personal pronouns discussed above, several other words are, usually or often, written as a consonant and associated short vowel:

- the particle *ko*, introducing cited speech; first occurrence, I.8.
- the possessive marker *ka*; III.4, V.7.
- the mark of the injunctive *ka*; III.8 (only one occurrence).
- the non-nasalised form of the postposition *kan* (‘on, over’); III.2, IV.11.
- the focalising particle *de*; first occurrences I.3, 17, 20 – 2x.

The anaphoric pronoun *wo* (e.g., II.6, IV.11, V.3) and the postposition *la* (e.g., I.14, II.13, 14) are at least occasionally written as isolated letters. (Perhaps in the majority of instances, but the irregular nature of the handwriting makes it impossible to affirm this.<sup>33</sup>)

<sup>32</sup> Referring here to the practice of linking certain conjunctions and prepositions to the following word, and the attached pronouns to the preceding word.

<sup>33</sup> In 6 instances, this morpheme is represented with a long (rather than a short) vowel, and thus with a letter of prolongation: I.25, II.11, III.1, 5, 11, 16. In only 4 instances is it unambiguously, graphically linked to another (morphemic and/or lexical) element: I.25 and III.16 *lilā*; I. 24 *sogola*; III.17: *sigilila*.



*Ḍon*, ‘to know’, is written as either one or two characters, depending on whether or not it is nasalised: *do* – I.17 (first occurrence), III.12 (second occurrence), III.13; *don* – I.17 (second occurrence), III.7, III.12 (first occurrence).

The following elements are occasionally written as isolated letters:

- the predicative marker *bi* (IV.2, perhaps also IV.6). However (see the beginning of this section), it is much more frequently joined to other elements.
- the conjunction *ni* (II.2), elsewhere joined to subsequent elements (see above).
- *di*, the verb ‘to give’, III.12.
- the verb *ɸ*, ‘to say’, V.4; perhaps also I.3.

In text II, lines 4–6 and 8, the contraction *k’i* (for *ka*, introducing a clause, and *i*, the following second person singular pronoun) is written as an isolated consonant accompanied by its diacritic vowel sign, then the pronoun written as a second isolated letter.

In a small number of cases, the writer separates elements that another speaker might perceive (and the current official orthography treats) as a single word. One example concerns a compound verb (I.5) and a second a doubled verb (IV.13), while the remainder concern compound nouns:

- I.5 *kunna dīrā* for *kunnadiyara*, ‘to have been lucky’.
- III.3 *samā sen* for *samasen*, ‘pillar’.
- III.14 *adama den* for *adamaden*, ‘human being’.
- IV.1 and 2 *kō kili* for *kōkili*, ‘testicle(s)’.
- IV.9 *kono bara* for *kōnōbara*, ‘belly’.
- IV.13 *tugu tugu* for *tugutugu*, ‘follow without interruption, be consecutive’.

Though this diversity in the nature of script words may be disconcerting to readers accustomed to languages with fixed orthographies, the thoughtfulness manifest at other levels of composition suggests that these graphic choices correspond to the San writer’s perception of the time intervals separating successive elements in oral discourse.

### 4.3 Consistency in spelling

Although many words are spelled consistently – i.e., in a fixed manner – throughout, others may be spelled in two, or even three, different ways. These orthographical variants are not arbitrary; rather, they correspond to alternative forms of a single word – forms whose frequency varies dialectally, but which may also coexist in the speech of a given individual or a local community. The notation of

these alternative forms shows that Amadou Jomworo Bary – for whom Bamana was a second language – was an excellent linguistic observer, and is indicative of the great care that he lavished upon these compositions. One may imagine him reflecting, as he wrote, as to how he, or a person he knew, might enunciate each element.

These variations principally concern unvoiced versus voiced *k/g*. Thus, the author writes *tɪntikiyā* once (III.8), but *tɪntigiyā* five times (III.8–10) (current standard spelling: *tɪnetigiya*, ‘belief’). Similarly, he writes *tulonke* (I.6, 9), but also *tulonge* (I.10, 11) (current standard spelling: *tulonke*, ‘to play’). They also concern the optional elision of *g* in intervocalic contexts. Thus, he writes *nogonna* (IV.12, V.15) but also *nonā* (IV.13). (Standard dictionary spelling: *ɲɔɡɔn*; however, the pronunciation *ɲɔɲɔn* is more common in some dialects; basic meaning: ‘together’). In addition, and in line with observed variations in pronunciation, a final nasal may or may not be marked (see, for example, the case of *dɔn*, above).

Although vocalic length is not always accurately marked in these texts, in general, the vowels of a given lexeme or morpheme are attributed the same value throughout.<sup>34</sup> However, as a result of these inaccuracies and the complexities of word segmentation, distinct words and word sequences may be spelled as homographs. This is recurrently the case with *kā*, which may variously represent the coordinating particle *ka* (for example, II.3 – 2x, II.4), the contraction of this particle and the third person singular pronoun *a* – *k’a* (for example, II.7, 9), the possessive marker *ka* (e.g., II.11), and the injunctive marker *ka* (e.g. III.12, 13) – although this last is also frequently spelled *ka* (e.g., II.11). Similarly, *nā* may represent *n’a*, the contraction of *nɪ*, ‘if’, + *a*, the aforementioned pronoun (e.g., I.5 – 2x), *n’a*, the contraction of *nɪ*, ‘with’, and the same pronoun (e.g., I.19, 23), a nasalised pronunciation of the postposition *ma*, correlate of the verb *dɪ* ‘to give’ (I.25), the future marker *na* (II.6), or the locative marker *na* (II.11). *Bā* can represent (for example) both the augmentative suffix *-ba* (e.g. I.1, 6) and the contraction *b’a*, corresponding to the predicative marker *bi* + the pronoun *a* (e.g., I.17).

<sup>34</sup> For example, the several different morphemes pronounced *ye* are regularly spelled *yē* – I.19 *ye* is an exception; the verb *kɛ* (‘to do’) is regularly spelled *ke* – I.10 *kē* is an exception; *mūgan* / *muga* (IV.4 and 12; already discussed above) – furthermore combined with other orthographic differences – present uniquely contrasting spellings.

## 4.4 Punctuation

The system of punctuation adopted in these texts is somewhat puzzling. It consists exclusively in dots, whose form corresponds to the full stops of modern Arabic and Western typography. Only text I seems fully and reasonably well punctuated (on the first page, rather than the second). On the whole, the texts seem to be under-punctuated, yet in some instances, a passage comprised between two dots seems too brief or incomplete. Thus, text I includes 24 dot stops for 26 lines, text II – 3 for 15 lines, text III – 7 for 19 lines, text IV – 9 for 16 lines, and text V – 7 for 17 lines. The dotting of III.7 (second unit), III.11 (middle unit), and especially IV.16 – where it interrupts the blessing formula – definitely does not correspond to the normal flow of speech, creating sentence fragments.

The question arises as to whether the writer completed the task of punctuating his compositions, and/or whether Almamy might have introduced or displaced some dots in the copying process. The form of the chosen punctuation sign raises further questions. Many older West African manuscripts use three pyramidally arranged dots ( ∙ ∙ ∙ ) rather than a single dot in order to indicate stops – still a current practice in both handwritten and printed copies of certain devotional works, while some early printed books use no sentence punctuation whatsoever. While long intervals between stops are explicable in terms of models that might have been available to the author – such as the longer Quranic verses, or early printed books – the short units are more puzzling.

On the whole, the punctuation system of these texts seems to suggest a familiarity with twentieth-century printed works – a situation that may have been exceptional about 1911 but common several decades later.

## 5 Difficulties in interpretation

Difficulties and uncertainties in the interpretation of these texts result from: unclear calligraphy; the absence of tone notation; irregular word segmentation; the irregular indication of vowel length; and inadequate punctuation. Although the use of a single sign to denote two distinct consonants (/t/ and /c/) could in principle lead to ambiguities, this does not seem to be the case in practice. That we do not have the originals is, of course, a major impediment to accurate interpretation.

Several examples of moot or difficult words and passages have already been given above. Remaining cases, in which one could have doubts as to the intended meaning of a word or word sequence, are discussed here.

Text I, line 4. Both Almamy and Sambourou asserted that *Brnifulaw* should be read as *Barani Fulaw*, ‘the Fulbe of Barani’. This is because most of the Fulfulde-speakers in San and its environs came from the nearby Fulbe-dominated chiefdom of Barani (located in what is now the Province of Kossi, Burkina Faso). However, another reading proposed recently<sup>35</sup>, of this only partially vocalised segment, makes for a grammatically more perfect sentence: *bari ni Fulaw*, ‘because if the Fulbe’.

Line 15. The term *masāw*, *masaw*, can be interpreted to mean either ‘kings’ or ‘elders’; the two words are distinguished only by tone (respectively: low, high; the first syllable of each may be nasalised – *mansa*). Whereas I had initially opted for the first interpretation, the second now seems more plausible, on ethnographic grounds. Although San was founded on what was once the territory of a kingdom (Dadugu) with a sacred ruler, this entity progressively lost its political and military significance; by about 1800, its Bamana-speaking chief reigned over a single village.<sup>36</sup> (The term *masa* applies to certain hereditary political figures, with sacral functions, only.) The surrounding Bwa and Minianka are stateless, and at most have village (rarely village-confederation) chiefs. San, long governed by the assembly of its founding clans, was ruled by a Muslim religious leader, the San Almamy, or ‘imam of San’, in the decades preceding the French conquest.<sup>37</sup> In addition, the reading *masaw bi sa*, ‘elders will die’ (lines 15/16), perfectly balances the immediately following phrase, *denmisenw bi bana*, ‘children will fall ill’. It is true that the preceding sentence mentions *kele*, ‘war’, but this is more likely to be in opposition to *heɛ*, ‘peace’, mentioned yet earlier in the text.

Line 16. The initial consonant of one of the final script segments of l. 16 carries one dot above and another below; one could therefore read it either as a *bā*’ or a *nūn*. In 1994, I had read *nitɪɲlike*, *ni tɪɲlike*, ‘and destruction’, but the reading *bitɪɲlike*, *bi tɪɲli ke*, ‘will destroy’, makes for a grammatically more perfect sentence.<sup>38</sup>

Line 23, one may hesitate as to the interpretation of *kō*. Should it be understood as referring to the ‘back’ (part of the body), standard orthography *kɔ* (high

<sup>35</sup> Vydrin/Dumestre 2014, 233. Concerning the chiefdom of Barani, see Diallo 1994, 1997, as well as the website of the association ‘Djangan Barani’, [www.djangan-barani.com](http://www.djangan-barani.com) (last accessed on 16/09/2016).

<sup>36</sup> Traoré 1970.

<sup>37</sup> Concerning political structures in this area, see for example Capron 1957, 1973, Jonckers 1987a, 1987b. Chiefships, including sacred chiefships, are, however, attested among Manding- and Soninke-speakers through the seventeenth century – see Pageard 1961a, 1961b and Bazin 1988, as well as Traoré, *ibid*. Bazin also provides an analysis of the concept of *mansaya*.

<sup>38</sup> Reading proposed by Vydrin/Dumestre 2014, 234.

tone), or to an expanse of water (modulated tone)? True, elsewhere in the text, where the reference is clearly to the San lake, one finds the spelling *kō* (1.8 – 2 occurrences); but this is not a decisive argument, since as seen above, a given term may have two (or exceptionally three) alternate spellings. The lake is only about a kilometer removed from the well, so it would have been quite feasible to carry a child there. Moreover, one may wonder whether the San author would have desired to specify that children are placed on the back to be taken home – since that is how they are usually transported.

Interviews held in San, both in 1998 and later, have not brought to light any recollections of ritual practices connecting infants to the well or the lake. On the other hand, research conducted in April 2016 in Sienso – the partially Bwa village on the outskirts of San, where Amadou Jomworo Bary resided intermittently for much of his adult life – provides very strong evidence in favour of the first interpretation. There, new-born Bwa are made to take a sip of water from their village's sacred well. In the following days, they are taken to the village's sacred lake, though it is about three kilometers distant. The child may be dipped in the lake or simply washed with its water. If, for any reason, the child cannot be brought to the lake, then water from the lake is carried to the village in order to bathe the child there.

It should be emphasised that since these texts do not note tone, the intended meaning of the two terms, *masāw* and *ko*, is undecidable on strictly linguistic grounds.

Text II, line 9. Almamy and I both read *a bila*, 'leave (or stop) it' (i.e., the process of pouring water). However, Vydrin and Dumestre have recently (2014, 236) read *a bela*, interpreting this to mean *a bæ la*, 'everywhere'. The vowel sign looks more like a somewhat vertical *kasra* (indicative of *i*), but the second interpretation (though both are possible) is more interesting. On the first interpretation, the sentence would mean 'Examine yourself, and if water has reached, stop [the pouring]'; on the second, 'Examine yourself, whether water has reached everywhere'. In doubt, I have maintained my initial interpretation, while indicating the second one in a note.

Text III, line 7. Almamy was convinced that he had made a mistake in copying, and that *kābāra* was a mistake and should have been *kaban* (see Tamari 1994, 113, n. 28). Though the former expression is not idiomatic<sup>39</sup>, the meaning one could attribute it contextually, in the phrase *dɔn k'a baara*, makes perfect

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39 One would expect *ka baara ni a ye* or *ka baara ke ni a ye*.

sense: ‘to know and apply’.<sup>40</sup> The present translation thus revises my previous (and still possible) interpretation, *dɔn ka ban*, ‘to know thoroughly’.

In Text III, lines 7 and 8, *numanya* is the Bamana technical term corresponding to the Arabic *ihsān*, a concept that has its sources in the Quran (especially Sura 9, v. 100) and ḥadīth, and ramifications in Islamic mysticism. It denotes absolute faith leading to appropriate, sincere conduct, and constitutes one of a triad of related concepts, the other two being *īmān* (faith) and *islām* (complete submission to God). Since *ihsān* does not have a standard translation in European languages, it is rendered here with reference to the etymological meanings of the Bamana and Arabic terms.<sup>41</sup>

Text IV, line 4. In the word sequence *wo fura ke sugū*, the last word – *sugu*, ‘sort, species’ – is not idiomatic in contemporary Bamana, and Almamy suggested it was written mistakenly, instead of *cogo*, ‘manner of doing, process’. But looking back, it seems unlikely that either the writer or the copyist would have erred concerning both the initial letter (everywhere else in these texts, Bamana *c* is rendered by Arabic *tā’*, *t*) and the two vowels – written with *ɗamma*, not reversed to designate the medial back vowels *o*, *ɔ*. Rather, the word choice here – as in the previous example – may be taken to suggest that the writer was not a native speaker of Bamana. On either reading – *sugu* or *cogo* –, the meaning of the sentence remains substantially similar: respectively, ‘This is the nature of the treatment’, ‘This is how the treatment is to be carried out’.

In lines 14–15 of the same text, the writer asserts: *Ala ko fura ka ke ni kalan ye ni yiri ye*. The term *kalan* has several meanings (study, reading, recitation), and one may wonder as to which is the most pertinent in this context. The author’s grandson Sambourou Bary suggests it is ‘recitation’ – a suggestion adopted in the present translation – and perhaps more specifically Quranic recitation. This type of recitation is not explicitly mentioned in the San manuscripts – in which all cited invocations are addressed to the personified well and *Guiera senegalensis* tree; but it is, indeed, often organised on behalf of the sick.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> See Vydrin/Dumestre 2014, 238.

<sup>41</sup> The Bamana term is formed from the derived nominal *numan*, ‘good’, and the suffix indicating abstraction *-ya*; it is translatable as ‘goodness’. The Arabic term is the verbal noun of the IVth, intensive form of the root *ḥsn*, ‘to be good or beautiful’.

<sup>42</sup> Of the three basic meanings of the term *kalan*, it seems possible to exclude one (‘reading’) in this context. In 1994, I had suggested the meaning ‘writing’, with reference to the practice of associating a written text with plants, in certain talismans (see e.g. Dieterlen/Ligers 1959; Barrière 1999). However, ‘writing’ is not literally one of the meanings of *kalan*; this is more appropriately conveyed by *seben* or one of its derivatives. Vydrin/Dumestre’s interpretation of this particular passage appears arbitrary (see below, appendix)

## 6 The texts: images, transliteration, transcription and translation

We now proceed to a presentation of the texts: images of Almamy Maliki Yattara's handwritten copies of the original documents, as well as his French notes; the transliteration of the Arabic characters; the transcription, i.e. the reconstitution of the Bamana discourse, taking into account those dialectal particularities that may be inferred from the Arabic orthography; and an English translation. However, even when the manuscripts point to more than one pronunciation of a given lexeme, I have retained only one in the transcription. The two words that are used exclusively for their Arabic (rather than Bamana) meaning values are printed in boldface in the transcription and translation.

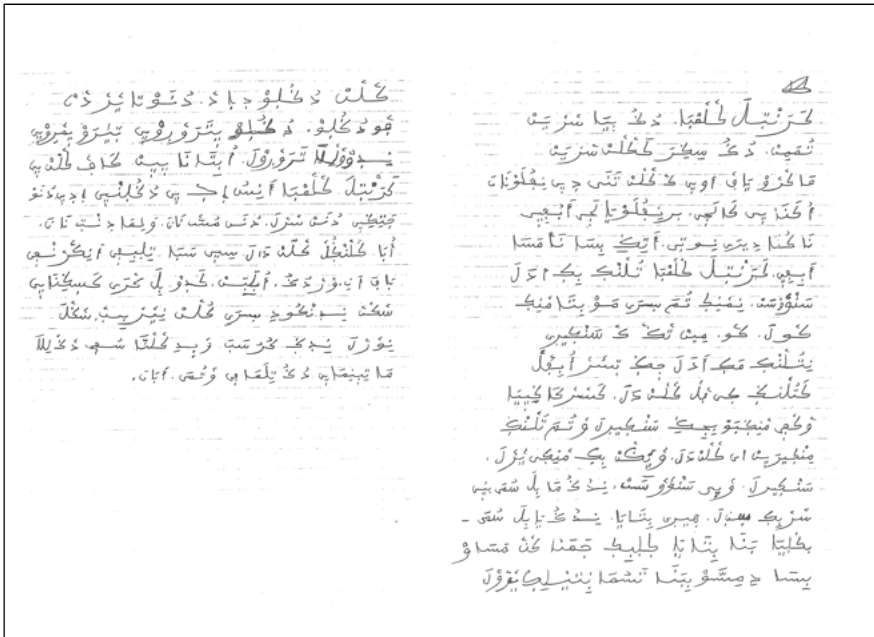
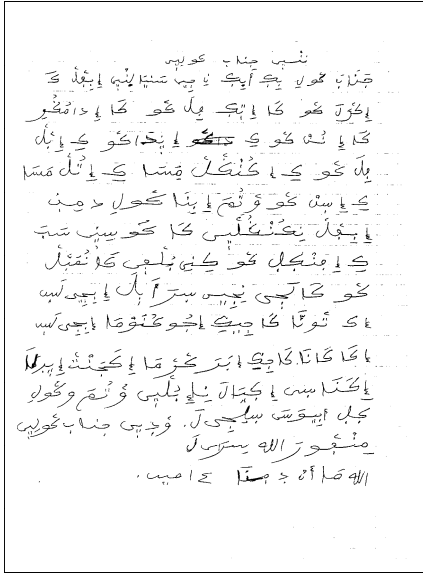
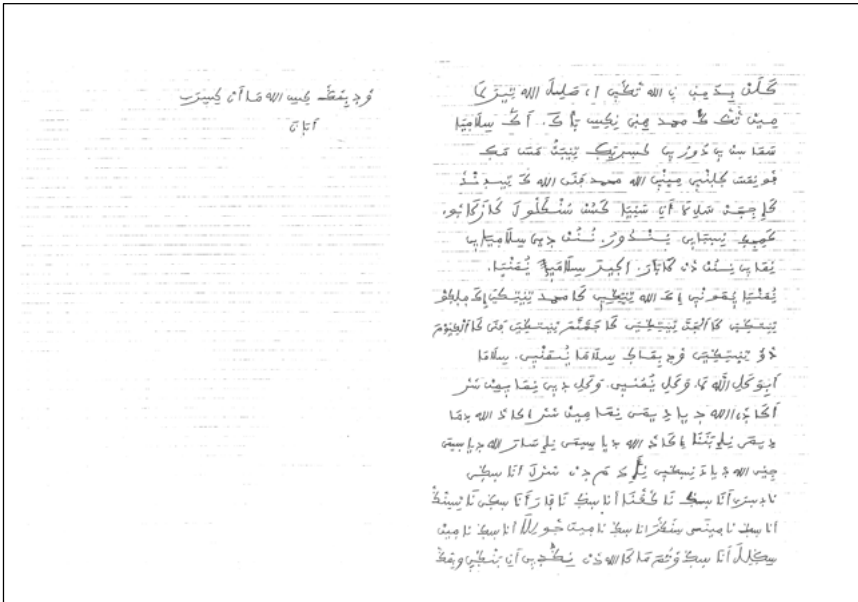


Fig. 1: Almamy Maliki Yattara's handwritten copies: Text 1(a), Text 1(b).



**Fig. 2:** Almamy Maliki Yattara's handwritten copies: Text 2.



**Fig. 3:** Almamy Maliki Yattara's handwritten copies: Text 3(a), Text 3(b).



[illegible]

**Fig. 4:** Almamy Maliki Yattara's handwritten copies: Text 4.

[illegible]

**Fig. 5:** Almamy Maliki Yattara's handwritten copies: Text 5.

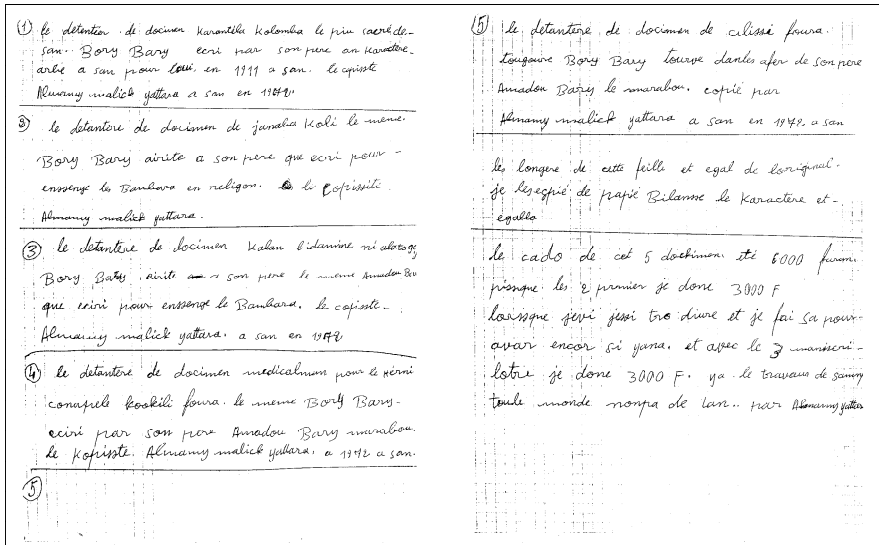


Fig. 6: Almamy's notes – page 1, page 2.

## I.

- 1 karantela kolombā. dugu beyā soro yan
- 2 tumamin. dugu sigira kakolon soro yan
- 3 mākorow yā fo awyē ko kolon tanā de yē nifulaw nāna
- 4 ukanā yē kā lajē. brnifulaw yā lajē abufiyē
- 5 nā kunā dīrā niwtē. atigi bisā nā masā
- 6 a bifiyē. karantela kolombā tulonke bike adala
- 7 sanwowsan. nimonike tuma serā maw bitā monike
- 8 kōla. kō. mīn togo ko sankērē
- 9 nitulonke make adala jege tesoro u bifolo
- 10 katulonge kē folo kolon dala. kasoro kā giyyēā
- 11 wokofē monigebaw bijigi sankērela wotuma tulonge
- 12 minkēra yen ay kolon dala. wopogon bike monikē yorola.
- 13 sankērēla. wo yē sanwowo san. nidugu mā bila sumā bjē
- 14 soro bike sene la. hērē bitāyā. nidugu yā bila sumā
- 15 bgleyā banā bitāyā kelebike jamanā kono masāw
- 16 bisā dimissaw bibanā tasumā bitnlike yorowla.
- 17 kolon dugulew de bā do. dunaw tā yoro don

- 
- 18 fō dugulew. dugulew yetaraworew yē teyāraw yemoriw yē  
 19 nidew wololā taraworewla. ubitānā yeyen kāfo kolon yē  
 20 karantela kolombā anisu e de yē dugulenyē e de yē dunaw  
 21 jatigiye dunan sorola. dunan musso nāna. walimā dente nāna.  
 22 ubā kulongulo kolon dāla siyē sabā tilebifē anikoronfē  
 23 bāfa ani worodugu. u blaban. kadeu bila korā kaseginā ye.  
 24 sokono nidenkūdi serā kulon niyoro bibo sogola  
 25 niworola nidege kuru saba wobedi kolonnā sufē dogolilā  
 26 mā tibenimāyē dugu tilamā fē wo tumā. a bāna.
- 

## II.

- 
- 1 ninyē janāba kūliyē.  
 2 janāba kōli bike abike ni jī sanyālenyē ibifolo ka  
 3 i korola kō kā i teke fila kō kā i dāmuguri  
 4 kā i nun kō ki i ɲedākō ki i bolo  
 5 fila kō ki i kungolo masā ki i tulo masa  
 6 ki i sen kō wo tuma i binā kōli dmine  
 7 i bifolo nikungoloyē kā kō sijnē saba  
 8 ki i fankele kō kinī bulofē kā numabolo  
 9 kō kā lajē nijī sera a bila i bijī lase  
 10 i k tōnnā kā jīgi ijūkunawmā ibiji lase  
 11 i kā kānā. kājīgi i bara koromā i kajanto iyerelā  
 12 ikanā se i keyāla nii buloyē wotuma wkōli  
 13 kele abīwasā selijī la. wo de yē janāba kōliyē  
 14 minfōra Allāh sirāā la  
 15 Allāh mā an demenā āmīn.
- 

## III.

- 
- 1 kalan bi damine ni Allāh togoyē an šalīla Allāh tīra lā  
 2 mīn togo ko Muḥammad hinē nikisi bāka. ako silāmeyā  
 3 samā sen ye dūru yē ksereyāke tɲbatu masa make  
 4 fō nimasa kelenyē minyē Allāh Muḥammad fanā Allāh ka tīdendo  
 5 kaijijan salilā ani saniyā kasun sunkalō la kāzakā bō.  
 6 kahijike nisebāye nindūru. nunun deyē silāmeyā yē
-

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7      nimā yē ninun don kābāra. akēra silāmayē numanyā.  
 8      numanyā yepumawnyē i ka Allāh tīntigiya kā Muḥammad tīntikiya ika melekew  
 9      tīntigiya kāaljanna tīntigiya ka jahhannama tīntigiya fanā kāalkiyawma  
 10     dowo tīntigiya wode bemāke silāmā numanyē. silāmā  
 11     abiwakali Allāh lā. wakali numanyē. wakali deyē nimā yemin soro  
 12     akā don Allāh de yā dīmā nimā mīn soro ikā do Allāh demā  
 13     dīmā nii bananā ikādo Allāh de yā sīmā nii sāra Allāh deyā sīmā  
 14     jīje Allāh de yā da nisegyē niadama den sorola anā segē  
 15     nadeserā anā sege na koṇonā anā sege nāfāra anā segē nā tisinogo  
 16     anā sege nāmīnā sinogora anā sege nā mīna jōlilā anā sege nā mīn  
 17     sigilila anā sege wotuma mā kā Allāh don nigudeyē ani bangē ye wbimogo  
 18     wodebimogo kisi Allāh mā an kisirā  
 19     a bāna.

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#### IV.

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1      niyē fura kumayē kō kili fura.  
 2      fura mīn be kō kili fura ke. kōkili  
 3      nā bananā a bike barakoro dimiyē  
 4      wo fura ke sugū ebi gōkun mūgan  
 5      ani kele. bō i bō tobi kā mō kosobe  
 6      wotuma. i bā woro ibi tumbutu kogo dōnī  
 7      kāla fāk timiyā i bā sī sokonō kā datugu.  
 8      kā sō fanā datugu adāla nidugu giyāra  
 9      i bōta kā dun fākī kono bara fā nijī bāla  
 10     i būmī. niyē ngeleni soro i bā faga kā kilibō  
 11     kā dun kā fara a ka wotumā ibījantō iyere la mussowfē.  
 12     fā kasē tile muga ṇogonna wotuma  
 13     i kenyārā. furā a bike kā tugu tugu ṇonā  
 14     fā kā dafā nādafāra inā nafayē. Allāh kō  
 15     fura kake nikalan yē ni yiriyē. ambā nafā soro  
 16     nī masā. sōnā mīnyē Allāh yē.

---

## V.

- 
- 1 ninyē kilisi fūra yē nimogo bananā  
 2 imanā banā geleyalen yē mogofē i bā bolomine  
 3 kā nesi yirimā wo yirinin togo ko kunjē  
 4 i bā fo yirimā yiribā kunjē e de yē yiri koro yē yiri  
 5 koro de bibanā koro fura kē. banabātonin a serā mākorow bela  
 6 umasē kābanā koro fura kē kā keneyā kunjē.  
 7 mbideli nifurayē mīn bii ka buluwla tilebibulu  
 8 nikoronfē bulu nibāfa bulu niworodugu bulu yē  
 9 wotuma ibijō downōi wotuma i bulukari fānbefē  
 10 ibō mara i bitanā yē ikasō ibā tobi banabāto  
 11 bā mī kā kō kāmī kā kō kā kō fō sipeseḡi  
 12 tileseḡi konō bnbāto a bkeneyā. a ba muḡudowonī  
 13 tugu tile seḡi nā mā keneyā. i bisēḡi ibifolotake  
 14 fā kā sedānnā ibitā sō i bā tobi kake folo  
 15 tā ḡogonyē. fō sipē seḡi nibnbāto mā keneyā  
 16 wola wotuma abisā. wodeyē kunjē fūra ye. tammat.  
 17 abāna.
- 

## I.

- 
- 1 Karantela kolonba. dugu bεε y'a<sup>43</sup> ɔɔɔ yan  
 2 tuma min, dugu sigira ka kolon ɔɔɔ yan.  
 3 maakɔɔw y'a fɔ anw<sup>44</sup> ye, ko kolon tana de ye, ni Fulaw nana  
 4 u kan'a ye k'a laje. bari ni<sup>45</sup> Fulaw y'a laje, a b'u fiyen,  
 5 ni a kunnadiyara, ni wo te, a tigi bi sa. ni a ma sa,  
 6 a bi fiyen. Karantela kolonba, tulonke bi ke a da la,  
 7 san wo san. ni monnike tuma sera, maaw bi taa monni ke  
 8 ko la, ko min tɔɔ ko Sankeere.  
 9 ni tulonke ma ke a da la, jege te ɔɔɔ. u bi folo  
 10 ka tulonke ke folo kolon da la, ka ɔɔɔ ka a ji jeya.
- 

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<sup>43</sup> Alternative, earlier reading: *dugu be yan*.

<sup>44</sup> Alternative, earlier reading: *aw*.

<sup>45</sup> Alternative, earlier reading suggested by Almamy Maliki Yattara: *Barani Fulaw*.

- 
- 11 wo kɔ fɛ, mɔnnikebaaw bi jigi Sankeere la. wo tuma tulonke  
 12 min kɛra yen, **ay** kɔlɔn da la, wo ɲɔɲɔ bi kɛ mɔnnikeyɔɲɔ la,  
 13 Sankeere la. wo ye san wo san. ni dugu m'a bila, suman bi ɲɛ,  
 14 sɔɲɔ bi kɛ sɛnɛ la. hɛrɛ bi caya. ni dugu y'a bila, suman  
 15 bi geleya, bana bi caya, kɛlɛ bi kɛ jamana kɔɲɔ, masaw  
 16 bi sa, denmisɛnw bi bana, tasuma bi tɪɲɛli kɛ<sup>46</sup> yɔɲɔ la.  
 17 kɔlɔn, dugulenw de b'a dɔn, dunanw t'a yɔɲɔ dɔn,  
 18 fɔ dugulenw. dugulenw ye Taraworew ye, Teeraw ye moriw ye.  
 19 ni denw wolola Taraworew la, u bi taa n'a ye yen, k'a fɔ kɔlɔn ye:  
 20 'Karantɛla kɔlɔnba, a ni su, e de ye dugulen ye, e de ye dunanw  
 21 jatigi ye. dunan sɔɲɔla, dunanmuso nana, walima dɛnɛ nana.'  
 22 u b'a kulongulo<sup>47</sup> kɔlɔn da la siɲɛ saba, tilebin fɛ ani kɔɲɔ fɛ,  
 23 bafan ani worodugu. u bi laban ka denw bila kɔ la, ka segin n'a ye  
 24 so kɔɲɔ. ni denkundi sera, kɔlɔn niyɔɲɔ bi ɲɔ sogo la  
 25 ni woro la, ni dɛgɛ kuru saba, wo bi di kɔlɔn ma su fɛ, dogoli la,  
 26 maa tɛ bɛn ni maa ye, dugutilama fɛ, wo tuma. a banna.
- 

## II.

- 
- 1 nin ye janaba koli ye.  
 2 janaba koli bi kɛ, a bi kɛ ni ji saniyalɛn ye. i bi fɔlɔ ka  
 3 i kɔɲɔla ko, ka i tɛgɛ fila ko, ka i da muguri,  
 4 ka i nun ko, k'i ɲɛda ko, k'i bolo  
 5 fila ko, k'i kungolo masa, k'i tulo masa,  
 6 k'i sɛn ko. wo tuma, i bi na koli daminɛ.  
 7 i bi fɔlɔ ni kungolo ye k'a ko siɲɛ saba,  
 8 k'i fan kɛlɛn ko kinibolo fɛ, ka numanbolo  
 9 ko, k'a lajɛ, ni ji sera, a bila.<sup>48</sup> i bi ji lase  
 10 i ka tɔn na, k'a jigi i jukunanw ma. i bi ji lase  
 11 i ka kan na, k'a jigi i barakɔɲɔ ma. i ka janto i yɛrɛ la,
- 

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<sup>46</sup> Earlier reading, correlated to a different interpretation of the Arabic handwriting: *tasuma ni tɪɲɛlike*.

<sup>47</sup> Alternative, currently more frequent pronunciation: *kolonkolon*. (See Bailleul 2007, 227.)

<sup>48</sup> Alternative reading, which assumes that one of the vowel signs of the seventh script unit of the Arabic text (as transliterated) was badly or mistakenly copied or written: *a be la* standing for *a bɛɛ la*.

- 
- 12 i kana se i keya la ni i bolo ye. wo tuma wo koli  
 13 kelen, a bi wasa seliji la. wo de ye janaba koli ye  
 14 min fɔra Ala sira la.  
 15 Ala maa an demena. amiina.
- 

### III.

---

- 1 kalan bi damine ni Ala tɔgo ye. an salila<sup>49</sup> Ala cira<sup>50</sup> la,  
 2 min tɔgo ko Muhamadu, hine ni kisi b'a kan. a ko, silameya  
 3 samasen ye duuru ye: ka seereya ke tɔɛbato masa ma ke  
 4 fɔ ni masa kelen ye min ye Ala, Muhamadu fana Ala ka ciden don;  
 5 ka i jijan sali la ani saniya, ka sun sunkalo la, ka zaka bɔ,  
 6 ka hiji ke ni se b'a ye, nin duuru nunun de ye silameya ye.  
 7 ni maa ye ninun dɔn k'a baara<sup>51</sup>, a kera silame ye. numanya.  
 8 numanya ye numanw ye: i ka Ala tɔɛtigiya, ka Muhamadu tɔɛtigiya, i ka meɛɛkew  
 9 tɔɛtigiya, ka aljana tɔɛtigiya, ka jahanama tɔɛtigiya fana, ka alkiyamadon,  
 10 wo<sup>52</sup> tɔɛtigiya, wo de bi maa ke silame numan ye. silame,  
 11 a bi wakali Ala la, wakali numan ye. wakali de ye, ni maa ye min sɔɔ,  
 12 a k'a dɔn Ala de y'a di i ma, n'i ma min sɔɔ i k'a dɔn Ala de ma a  
 13 di i ma. ni i banana i k'a dɔn Ala de y'a se i ma, ni i sara Ala de y'a se i ma.  
 14 diɛ, Ala de y'a da ni segen ye. ni adamaden sɔɔla, a na segen.  
 15 ni a desera, a na segen. ni a kongɔna, a na segen, ni a fara, a na segen. ni a te sinɔgo,  
 16 a na segen. ni a menna sinɔgo ra, a na segen. ni a menna jɔli la, a na segen. ni a menna  
 17 sigili la, a na segen. wo tuma, maa ka Ala dɔn, ni gundo ye ani bange ye, wo bi mɔgo,  
 18 wo de bi mɔgo kisi. Ala maa an kisira.  
 19 a banna.
- 

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<sup>49</sup> The verbal root is generally pronounced *sɔli* in contemporary Bamana.

<sup>50</sup> Usually pronounced *kira* in contemporary Bamana.

<sup>51</sup> Alternative, earlier reading suggested by Almamy Maliki Yattara: *ka ban*.

<sup>52</sup> Following Vydrin and Dumestre's reading (2014, 239), I have here added the anaphoric pronoun *wo* (which does not appear in my earlier transcription). This reading better accounts for the Arabic orthography *dowo* (though it in no way changes the substantive meaning of the sentence).

## IV.

- 
- 1      nin ye fura kuma ye, kəkili fura,  
 2      fura min bi kəkili furake. kəkili,  
 3      ni a banana, a bi ke barakɔɔɔ dimi ye.  
 4      wo furake sugu<sup>53</sup>, e bi ngɔkun muga  
 5      ani kelen ɔɔ. i b'o tobi k'a mɔ kosebe.  
 6      wo tuma, i b'a wɔɔɔ, i bi Tunbutu kɔɔɔɔɔɔ  
 7      k'a la, f'a ka timiya. i b'a si so kɔɔ ka a datugu,  
 8      ka so fana datugu a da la. ni dugu giyara<sup>54</sup>,  
 9      i b'o ta ka a dun f'a k'i kɔɔɔɔɔ fa. ni ji b'a la,  
 10     i b'o min. ni i ye ngelenin sɔɔɔ, i b'a faga k'a kili ɔɔ,  
 11     ka a dun k'a fara a kan. wo tuma, i b'i janto i yere la musow fe,  
 12     f'a ka se tile muga kɔɔɔ na. wo tuma,  
 13     i keneyara. fura, a bi ke ka tugutugu kɔɔɔ na,  
 14     f'a ka dafa. ni a dafara, i n'a nafa ye. Ala ko,  
 15     fura ka ke ni kalan ye, ni yiri ye. an b'a nafa sɔɔ  
 16     ni masa sɔɔna, min ye Ala ye.
- 

## V.

- 
- 1      nin ye kilisi fura ye. ni mɔɔ banana,  
 2      i mana bana geleyalen ye mɔɔ fe, i b'a bolo mine  
 3      k'a jɛsin yiri ma. wo yiri nin tɔɔ ko kunje.  
 4      i b'a fɔ yiri ma: 'yiriba kunje, e de ye yiri sɔɔ ye. yiri  
 5      kɔɔ de bi bana kɔɔ fura ke<sup>55</sup>. banabaato nin, a sera maakɔɔw beɛ la,  
 6      u ma se k'a bana kɔɔ furake k'a keneya, kunje.  
 7      n b'i deli, ni fura ye min b'i ka buluw la, tilebin bulu  
 8      ni kɔɔɔfe bulu ni bafan bulu ni worodugu bulu ye.'
- 

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53 Alternative, earlier reading suggested by Almamy Maliki Yattara, on the ground that *sugu* was a mistake for *cogo*: *fura kecogo*; on this assumption, *furake cogo* would also be a possible reading.

54 The forms *jera* and *jeyara* are more common in contemporary Bamana.

55 Or alternatively, with a similar meaning: *furake*.



- 
- 9      wo tuma, i b'i ɲɔɲɔnin. wo tuma, i bulu<sup>56</sup> kari fan bɛɛ fɛ  
 10     i b'o mara, i bi taa ni a ye i ka so, i b'a tobi, banabaato  
 11     b'a min, ka ko ka min ka ko ka ko fɔ siɲɛ segin,  
 12     tile segin ɲɔɲɔ. banabaato, a bi kɛɲɛya. a b'a muɲu dɔɲɔnin  
 13     tugun tile segin. ni a ma kɛɲɛya, i bi segin i bi fɔɔ ta kɛ,  
 14     f'a ka se dan na. i bi taa so, i b'a tobi k'a kɛ fɔɔ ta  
 15     ɲɔɲɔ ye, fɔ siɲɛ segin. ni banabaato ma kɛɲɛya  
 16     wo la, wo tuma a be sa. wo de ye kunɲɛ fura ye. **tammat.**  
 17     a banna.
- 

## I.

- 
- 1      The great well Karantela. The whole village found it here.  
 2      At the time the village was founded, the well was already there.  
 3      The old people say that the well's prohibition is that when the Fulbe come,  
 4      they must not look closely at the well. Because if the Fulbe scrutinize it, it will blind them  
 5      – if s/he's lucky, otherwise s/he'll die<sup>57</sup>. The person will either die  
 6      or go blind. Games take place near the great well Karantela,  
 7      every year. When the fishing season comes, people go fishing  
 8      in the lake, the lake called Sankeere.  
 9      If the games aren't held near it, fish won't be caught.  
 10     They begin by holding games near the well, so as to purify it.  
 11     Then, the fishers go down to Sankeere, and [as for] the games  
 12     that take place there, **that is** near the well, similar ones are held at the fishing place,  
 13     at Sankeere. So it is every year. As long as the village doesn't forsake it [this custom],  
 14     the crops will be good,  
 15     cultivation will be successful. There will be peace and prosperity. [But] if the village  
 16     abandons it, crops  
 17     will be insufficient, there will be much sickness, there will be war in the land, elders<sup>58</sup>
- 

<sup>56</sup> Vydrin/Dumestre 2014, 244 propose the reading: *i b'olu*. This is possible but not plausible, since the vowel indicated is a *ɗamma* (u) rather than a reversed *ɗamma* (o), and word repetition is highly characteristic of oral discourse. On my reading, this phrase is in the imperative mood.

<sup>57</sup> As in many other West African languages, Bamana pronouns do not distinguish gender. Also, Bamana oral discourse switches easily from the singular to the plural and vice-versa, as exemplified here (lines 3–6) and below (lines 19–23).

<sup>58</sup> Alternative translation of *masaw*: 'kings'. See the discussion, p. 230.

- 
- 16 will die, children will fall ill, fire will ravage a number of places.  
 17 The well, it is the natives that know it. Strangers aren't familiar with it,  
 18 only natives. The natives are Traore, [whereas] the Tera are Muslim scholars.  
 19 When children are born to the Traore, they bring it [the child] there, then address the well:  
 20 'Great well Karantela, good evening. You are the true native, you are the host of strangers.  
 21 We have received a stranger. A female stranger has come, or else a boy has come.'  
 22 They roll it three times [on each side of] the well, west and east,  
 23 north and south. Finally, they dip the children in the lake<sup>59</sup>, then return home with them.  
 24 On the occasion of the name-giving ceremony, the well receives its share of meat  
 25 and cola nuts, as well as three millet balls. [All] these are given to the well secretly at night,  
 26 in deepest night, at dead of night. The end.
- 

## II.

- 
- 1 This is the [explanation of the] major ablution.  
 2 The major ablution is accomplished with water, with pure water. You begin by  
 3 washing your private parts and the palms of both hands, rinsing your mouth,  
 4 cleaning your nose, washing your face, washing your two hands,  
 5 passing your hands over your head and your ears,  
 6 and washing your feet. Then, you begin the [major] ablution [properly speaking].  
 7 You begin with your head, washing it thrice,  
 8 then, you wash each side [of your body], the right then the left,  
 9 and you examine yourself: if water has reached, then cease [this phase of the purification is now complete].<sup>60</sup> You pour water  
 10 about your nape so that it runs down to your buttocks, then you pour it  
 11 about the front of your neck so that it runs down to the pubic region. Be careful  
 12 not to touch your male organs with your hand. With this, the purification
- 

---

<sup>59</sup> Or perhaps, simply 'bring the children to the lake'. The verbo-nominal *bila*, which has an especially wide semantic range, can among its varied meanings, signify either 'place by' or 'place in' (depending on the context). Alternative translation of *u bi* [...] *denw bila kɔ la*: 'they put the children on their backs' (in order to carry them home). See the discussion, pp. 230–231.

<sup>60</sup> Alternative translation, corresponding to the transcription *a bee la* (in lieu of *a bila*): '[...] yourself, whether water has reached all places'. See above, p. 231.

- 
- 13 has been completed, it [also] satisfies the requirements of minor ablution. That is the major ablution,  
 14 prescribed by the divine Law.  
 15 May God help us. Amen.
- 

### III.

- 
- 1 Study begins with the name of God. We have pronounced the blessing formula upon the Messenger of God,  
 2 whose name is Muhammad, mercy and salvation upon him.<sup>61</sup> It is said<sup>62</sup>: Islam's  
 3 pillars are five. To bear witness that the only True Lord  
 4 is the One Lord – Who is God. As for Muhammad, he is God's Messenger.<sup>63</sup>  
 5 Earnestly endeavour to accomplish prayer and purification, to fast in Ramadan, to give alms,  
 6 and – provided you have the [necessary] means – to perform the pilgrimage. Islam consists in these five.  
 7 If a person knows them and acts accordingly<sup>64</sup>, he has become a Muslim. Goodness.<sup>65</sup>  
 8 Goodness consists in [the following] goodnesses: you must believe in God, and in [His Messenger] Muhammad, and in the angels,  
 9 and in [the reality of] Paradise – and also Hell and the Day of Resurrection,
- 

---

**61** This is a reference to the blessing formula regularly pronounced after the name of the Prophet (*ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhi wa-sallama*), often translated into English as 'Peace and mercy upon him'. *Hine ni kisi b'a kan* is the standard Bamana translation of this Arabic formula. See more below, pp. 250, 267–268. It is uncertain whether the use of the perfective in the Bamana phrase *an salila* ('We have pronounced' – *-la* is an intransitive perfect suffix) should be construed merely as a calque on the Arabic verb, or as referring, additionally, to past instances of recitation. Therefore, this phrase could equally well be translated using the present tense, as was the case in my initial (1994) publication.

**62** The words *a ko*, which typically introduce a quotation, are particularly frequent in scholarly discourse, where they generally refer to the source (often a written work) of the information or interpretation being presented. It is usually not necessary to translate them explicitly, since their meaning is adequately conveyed by quotation marks. In scholarly discourse, they tend to be used repetitively, often becoming a tic.

**63** The passage *tinyebato* [...] *don* (lines 3–4) is a Bamana translation of the *shahāda* (Muslim creed) *lā ilāh illā Llāh wa-Muḥammad rasūl Allāh* ('There is no God but God, and Muhammad is His Messenger.') See more below, 268.

**64** Alternative translation, corresponding to the transcription *ka ban* (in lieu of *k'a baara*): 'If a person knows these thoroughly, [...]'. See above, 231–232.

**65** Here and in the following sentence, 'goodness' corresponds to *jumanya*, the Bamana technical term that corresponds to the Islamic concept of *iḥsān*. See above, p. 232.

- 
- 10 that is what makes a person a good Muslim. A Muslim,  
 11 he places his trust in God, a full trust. Placing one's trust means that, if a person obtains something,  
 12 he should know that it is God Who gave it to him. That, if you didn't obtain something, you should know that it is God Who didn't  
 13 give it to you. If you fall ill – you must know that it is God Who brought it [this illness] upon you; that, if you die, it is God Who has imposed this upon you.  
 14 The world, God has created it [full of] effort and suffering. When a human being obtains satisfaction, he suffers.  
 15 When he fails, he [also] suffers. If he goes hungry, he suffers. If he is sated, he [also] suffers. If he doesn't sleep,  
 16 he suffers. If he sleeps for a long time, he suffers. If he stands for a long time, he suffers. If he sits for a long time  
 17 he suffers. Thus, a person will know about God, that which is secret and that which is manifest, that makes a person –  
 18 that is what may save a person, may God save us.  
 19 The end.
- 

#### IV.

- 
- 1 This is a healing formula, a remedy for the testicles,  
 2 a remedy that heals the testicles. When the testicles  
 3 become diseased, the loins become painful.  
 4 The nature of this remedy<sup>66</sup>: you take twenty-one water lilies.  
 5 Cook them well,  
 6 then, take them [the individual seeds] out of their sheaths, and add a little salt from Timbuktu,  
 7 enough to give them an agreeable taste. Leave it [this food] overnight in a closed receptacle,  
 8 and also shut the door of the house. At dawn,  
 9 take it and eat of it until you're sated. If there's some liquid,  
 10 drink it. If you can get hold of a ground squirrel<sup>67</sup>, kill it and remove its testicles,
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<sup>66</sup> Alternative translations, based on the readings *fura kecogo* and *furake cogo*, respectively: 'How to prepare this treatment: [...]' and 'This is the course of treatment'.

<sup>67</sup> *Xerus erythropus*.

- 
- 11 eat of it [the squirrel including its testicles] and add [the remainder] to the above<sup>68</sup>.  
Now then, be careful [not to approach] women,  
12 for about twenty days. Then,  
13 you will have healed. The remedy should be taken regularly [on consecutive days]  
14 until its term. When this has been completed, you will realise its benefit. God has  
commanded  
15 that remedies be prepared using recitation and plants. We will benefit from them  
16 if the Lord – Who is God – so wills it.
- 

## V.

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- 1 This is a magical remedy. Sometimes, when a person becomes ill –  
2 should you observe that a person is severely ill, take him by the hand  
3 and make him face a tree, a tree called *kunje*<sup>69</sup>.  
4 You will address the tree: ‘Great *kunje* tree, indeed you are a venerable tree, only a  
venerable tree  
5 can cure an old malady. This patient has already consulted all the old persons,  
6 they have been unable to treat and cure his long-standing illness. *Kunje*,  
7 I beg you [to help him], should there be a healing principle in your leaves: the western  
leaves,  
8 the eastern leaves, the northern and southern ones.’  
9 Then, you pause a while, after which you pick leaves from all [four] sides.  
10 You keep them, take them to your home and cook them; the patient  
11 will drink of it [the decoction] and wash with it, drink and wash, and wash repeatedly,  
eight times.  
12 The patient will recover within eight days. He will wait a little,  
13 again another eight days. If he hasn’t recovered, you will repeat your initial actions,  
14 up to the limit [of eight days]. You will go home and cook [the leaves], in the same  
manner as the first time,  
15 up to eight times. If the patient hasn’t recovered  
16 with this, then he will die. That is the remedy provided by the *kunje*. **The end.**  
17 The end.
- 

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<sup>68</sup> I.e., to the casserole of seasoned water lilies. I am grateful to one of the anonymous referees for the suggestion that in this sentence, *fara* should be interpreted as the verbo-nominal meaning ‘to add’.

<sup>69</sup> *Guiera senegalensis*.



**Fig. 7:** Sidy (nicknamed 'Koké') Traoré, caretaker of the sacred well of Karantela, August 1998. ©Tal Tamari



**Fig. 8:** Inside view of the sacred well of Karantela, showing brickwork, April 2016. ©Tal Tamari



**Fig. 9:** The San lake, covered with flowering water lilies, April 2016. © Tal Tamari



**Fig. 10:** The sacred well at Sienso, April 2016. © Tal Tamari



## 7 Cultural and doctrinal interpretation

These texts are in many ways typical of the doctrinal and religious outlooks of traditionally-trained West African scholars. The points enumerated in the third, theological text – belief in the unseen world, notably comprising the angels, Paradise and Hell, as well as the One, omnipotent and omniscient God – are not only expounded in the basic theological texts (most significantly, the *Umm al-barāhīn* of Muḥammad al-Sanūsī, as well as its various extracts and abridgments)<sup>70</sup>, but are among those most frequently stressed (in my experience) in religious education sessions aimed at adults as well as in public preaching. Many teachers begin or close each session by reminding their listeners of the reality of – and obligatory belief in – this unseen world. The fact that the second sentence of the text (line 1) is enunciated in the second person plural *an salila* [or: *solila*] *Ala cira la*, ‘We have pronounced [or: ‘recited’] blessings upon the Prophet’ – suggests that it is the summary of the essential points of a lesson, which may begin with devotional litanies. The inevitable weariness and disappointments of this-worldly existence are recurrent elements of West African (or at least Malian) teaching and preaching, expressed with exceptional poignancy in this text.<sup>71</sup> The reference to ‘the secret and the manifest’ (in the Revealed Book and the Creation) is a significant theme in North and West African Muslim thought, evidenced in the *Umm al-barāhīn*, and one that has also attracted other Malian scholars.<sup>72</sup> Personal cleanliness and the ablutions are also emphasised by religious teachers, especially in instruction aimed at adults (see text II).

Most scholars have some expertise in the treatment of illness, and many specialise in particular ailments. They often possess some written documents pertaining to these treatments, as well as other forms of esoteric action. Though in

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**70** The influence in West Africa of the work of this Tlemcen-born author (life dates: ca. 1435–1490) has been studied in depth by Louis Brenner; see, for example, Brenner 2005 (first ed.: 1984), 79–86.

**71** For example, in his commentary on the first *sūra* of the Quran (*Al-Fātiḥa*), a highly-regarded scholar from the Segou area declares: ‘Regarding any of the pleasures of this world – even if you had some happiness, one day it comes to an end. Now then, one day, something happens which displeases you, you are anxious. But Paradise is not like that. You won’t sorrow, you won’t become ill, you won’t age, ever again.’ (Tamari 1996, 73, 78.) According to these scholars, every earthly pleasure necessarily has its correlated frustration.

**72** For example, a Segou scholar stated, in recounting a late-medieval Arabic romance, that the young hero ‘implored God, by all His secrets and all that He had rendered manifest’ (*a labanna sa ka damakasi Ala ma, a ka gundow ani a ka bangew bee lajelen la*) (Tamari 2013b, 241, 244.)



my personal experience so far, in Mali, these documents have been in Arabic, recent research in Bobo-Dioulasso has uncovered several Jula manuscripts.<sup>73</sup>

The association of writing, recitation and plants – and, somewhat more rarely, animal substances – in the preparation of amulets or the course of treatment is also typical, as noted by several researchers<sup>74</sup> and observed by the present writer in the course of fieldwork. The role of sympathetic magic in Muslim and other forms of esotericism is well-known, and these texts provide several examples. There is an analogy between the venerable age of the tree and the long-term nature of the illness to be treated (text V), and between the organs of the ground squirrel (*Xerus erythropus*) and those of the patient (text IV). The complete closure of the house or room in which the water lily (*Nymphaea lotus*) seeds must be kept overnight enhances and reinforces that of the lidded cooking receptacle (text IV). Washing and ingestion are the most usual ways of absorbing healing ingredients, and are often prescribed concurrently. Reference to the four cardinal directions (texts I and V) is another characteristic feature of both Muslim and non-Muslim West African magic. So is number symbolism: the numbers three, four, eight, and twenty figure in these texts.

It should be noted that both water lily seeds and the ground squirrel are common foodstuffs in rural Mali; indeed, the former is a major element of the diet in the Masina and, formerly, this was also the case in San. Mineral salt, mined in the Sahara and transported via Timbuktu, is considered particularly healthful in the diet and is often prescribed by traditional medical practitioners (though many persons are now also aware of the goitre-preventing action of the iodine in imported sea salt). Boiled leaves of the *Guiera senegalensis* tree (see text V) are used in the treatment of numerous illnesses.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Donaldson 2013, 26–28, 31–32.

<sup>74</sup> With respect to the Bamana milieu, see: Dieterlen/Ligers 1959; Barrière 1999; Mbodj-Pouye 2012; Traoré 1965, *passim*; Dumestre/Touré 2007, *passim*.

<sup>75</sup> See Traoré 1965, *passim*; Berhaut 1974, t. 2, 378–381; Garnier 1976, 10, 23, 37, 1986, 135; Thoyer-Rozat 1979, 83–85; von Maydell 1992 (1st ed.: 1983), 278–279; Malgras 1992, 140–141; Arbonnier 2009, 267; Forgues/Bailleul 2009, 92. Malgras 1992, 141 comments that the *kunje* is believed to be ‘the oldest tree in the world’; this suggests that the efficacy of the remedy outlined in Text IV is related not only to the age of an individual tree, but to the role of the species in a mythological scheme of Creation. According to Garnier 1976, 10; 1986, 135, 149, the tree’s two designations, suggested by the greyish colour of its leaves – *kunje* (literally: ‘white’ ‘top’, ‘summit’ or ‘head’) and *musokorɔninkunje* (lit.: ‘white haired old woman’) – refer to white hair as a sign of age. Birnbaum 2012 studies some of the plant species mentioned here in their ecological context.

In the Malian context, *dege* refers to various foods, both cooked and uncooked, prepared from millet (*Penicillaria spicata*: Bamana *saɲɔ*, French *petit mil*).<sup>76</sup> The uncooked varieties are used in ritual, whereas the cooked ones have been – at least in recent decades – also consumed in non-ritual contexts, as a choice food. In at least one Bamana region, balls of *dege* have, up till recently, been distributed in traditional (non-Islamic) child-naming ceremonies, in place of or in addition to cola nuts.<sup>77</sup>

As is typical of magical treatments in many ‘traditional’ societies, text V (lines 15–16) makes provision for the maintenance of belief despite the eventuality of failure: if the patient does not heal, this is because his disease is incurable, and he will die.<sup>78</sup> Text IV (l. 15–16) considers the matter from an explicitly Islamic vantage point: the patient will heal, if God so wills it.

One can only speculate as to whether the difference in the titles of texts IV and V (respectively *fura kuma*, ‘healing formula’ or ‘healing instructions’, and *kilisi fura*, ‘magical remedy’<sup>79</sup>) implies the perception, on the part of the writer, of a difference in the nature of the two treatments. In the former instance, is the hoped-for healing simply the usual correlate<sup>80</sup> of certain ‘natural’ ingredients, processes and actions, whereas in the second, is it the invocation to the tree (or perhaps some other invocation, not explicit in the text) which is the crucial element? Does the term *kalan* (‘reading’, ‘recitation’, ‘study’) mentioned in text IV.15 refer to the recitation of the Quran and/or Islamic benedictions, or to some other procedure?

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**76** In the Malinke country of northern Guinea, the term *dege* refers to rice-based culinary preparations, used primarily (or exclusively?) in ritual, both traditional and Islamic; the corresponding, locally employed French expression is *pain blanc* (‘white bread’).

**77** Fieldwork in the Beledugu region – specifically, in the area corresponding to the administrative division (‘Cercle’) of Kolokani – in 1985–1988. While cola nuts have long been used in divination, it seems that their other ritual uses have gained in importance over the course of the twentieth century, concomitant to the growth of trade and islamisation.

**78** As classically analysed by Evans-Pritchard in his study of the Zande 1937 or (with reference to a medieval and early modern European context) by Bloch 1924.

**79** *Kilisi* signifies ‘magical formula’ or ‘incantation’, *kuma* means ‘word’ or ‘speech’, and *fura* means ‘remedy’.

**80** The word ‘correlate’ is used advisedly, since Asharite theology, which is widely studied in West Africa, denies any natural causality, basically claiming that God is the sole Mover. Discussions of the merely apparent effects of fire or a knife blade, and of miracles as a particularly clear illustration of the absence of natural causality – all ultimately based on the numerous written commentaries of al-Sanūsī’s *Umm al-barāhīn* – are recurrent in the discourse of Malian scholars.

Texts I and V raise the question of the author's views as to the reality and efficacy of 'supernatural' agencies not explicitly recognised in Islamic belief, exemplified here by the personified well and the *Guiera senegalensis* tree. Taking into account the theological text (III), one may suggest the following interpretation, which also corresponds to my fieldwork experience: many Malian (and probably more generally West African) Muslims do not deny the agency of a diversity of supernatural powers, but stress that these are firmly subordinated to that of the One God. For example, a highly learned scholar from the Segou region affirms, in his commentary on a passage of the Quran, that in the hereafter, the *boli* ('power objects' or 'fetishes') will be bound powerless in Hell, but he does not explicitly deny them agency in This-World (*al-dunyā*).<sup>81</sup> In his retelling of a late-medieval Arabic chivalric romance, another highly learned scholar from the Segou area points out that the anthropomorphic idol and magical ring that play a crucial role in the action are in fact animated by jinn<sup>82</sup> (entities that are repeatedly cited in the Quran and fully recognised by nearly all currents of Islamic thought). Almamy, in his youth, killed an animal ('The Master of the Waters') sacred to the non-Muslim Bamana-speakers among whom he resided. However, he fell ill and was severely reprimanded by his teacher, who engaged in intense prayer in order to save him.<sup>83</sup> Almamy's biography provides many examples of the powers of both good (Muslim) and evil (non-Muslim) jinn.<sup>84</sup>

Amadou Jomworo Bary, whose description of the ceremonies held at the emblematic well and lake of San conveys a sense of wondering admiration, contests neither the holding of the rituals nor the prohibition on approaching the well that affects Fulbe like himself. In the present state of knowledge, this text (I) is perhaps a unique example of an '*ajamī*' composition that memorialises customs other than those of the author's home region.

Rites involving wells, ponds and other bodies of water are particularly characteristic of the Bwa, who constitute a significant proportion of the population of south-eastern Mali (as well as adjoining regions of Burkina Faso) and control some of the oldest villages in the San area (including Parana and Terekungo, both

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**81** Commentary on S. 55, v. 35: '[...] we should know that idols can neither aid us nor harm us in the hereafter. [...] They have no happiness there, they will never again have any power over us. [...] The idols that you worshipped, those of stone and those of wood, you will find them crushed down in hell.' (Tamari forthcoming.)

**82** See Tamari 2013b, 230–233, 240, 245–246.

**83** See Yattara/Salvaing 2000, 224–227, 406–407.

**84** Ibid., 243–248, 340–351.

of which participate in the annual ceremonies).<sup>85</sup> However, annual fishing rites (towards the end of the hot, dry season, and just before the rains) may take place wherever there are suitable permanent lakes – including Bamba (in the Dogon country, administrative Region of Mopti), near Dia in the Masina, and in the Maninka country of northern Guinea. While these rites often involve invocations addressed to non-Islamic entities, they may become islamised through the enunciation of Islamic blessing formulae (as is the case in Dia) or secularised – the occasion for a variety of folkloric and artistic manifestations – as is currently the case in San.<sup>86</sup> Since 2009, the annual San fishing and water rites have been included in UNESCO's listing of humanity's 'intangible cultural heritage'.<sup>87</sup>

While the Masina where Amadou Jomworo Bary grew up is often thought of as a region that has been highly islamised since Shaykhou Amadou's jihad in the early nineteenth century, and the San area as including, until recently, only pockets of Muslims (in the city and a few other settlements), the situation is actually more complex. The Masina (and adjacent regions, as depicted in Almamy's autobiography) have included large numbers of Bamana-speakers faithful to the 'traditional' religions well into the twentieth century. While some lineages in San and its area claim to have been Muslim for hundreds of years, and the Tera, with the title of *alimami*, ruled San from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, many other lineages (including some established in the city) only converted to Islam (or in some instances Christianity) in the course of the twentieth century (or are converting now). In other words, Amadou Jomworo Bary probably experienced in the San area, a situation analogous to that with which he was already familiar from the Masina – characterised by the imbrication and often but not always peaceful coexistence of Muslim and non-Muslim lineages and communities. While many or most Bamana-speaking 'Marka', as well as the Fulbe, would have been at least nominally Muslim, the Bamana, Minianka and Bwa would

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**85** Studies of the San fishing rites include several unpublished student papers and magazine articles: Bamoussa/Dakouo 1978, Tienro 1985, Samaké 1987, Doumbia 1995, Koita 1998. There is also a website, maintained by the 'Alliance Dofera ni Banabako de San' in cooperation with the Traoré family: [www.festivalsanke.fr.gd](http://www.festivalsanke.fr.gd) (last consulted 26.09.2016). Kamaté 2011 is a vast study of water rites among the Bwa, while Kamaté 2016 more specifically concerns the San fishing rites. Other studies of water rites include Diarra 1976 and Kamaté 1983, and (with respect to Burkina) Werthmann 2014.

**86** Comments based on my field observations in Dia (in 2004, 2008) and in northern Guinea (2005).

**87** See the article 'Sanké mon, collective fishing rite of the Sanké' on [www.unesco.org./culture/ich](http://www.unesco.org./culture/ich). (last accessed on 23/09/2016).

have been almost exclusively non-Muslim. The emergence of a 'neo-traditionalist' religious movement, among Minianka-speakers in the San area, in the 1940s and 1950s<sup>88</sup> attests to the vitality of local religions.

The distinction between the Tera *moriw* or 'marabouts' and the Traore, which text I presents as the earliest inhabitants of San (l. 18, *dugulenw*), is of a type with the hereditary distinction between 'scholarly' or 'Old Muslim' *mori* and 'warrior' lineages (designated as *soninke* or *tuntigi*, depending on the region) which is especially characteristic of southern Manding-speaking societies. The *mori* observe Islamic ritual and legal prescriptions with a certain rigour, whereas members of the second category were, through the earlier twentieth century, either lax Muslims or non-Muslims.<sup>89</sup>

The term *tulonke*, used in Text I, is of particular interest. Although in everyday discourse, this compound word (from *tulon*, 'play, amusement' and *ke*, 'to do') most frequently refers to children's playing or to sports activities, it is also systematically used by non-Muslims (and syncretic Muslims) to refer to religious ceremonies – perhaps, especially, ones which have a theatrical or 'show' component. Does this usage imply that these Bamana-speakers perceive a fundamental distinction between ritual, and other, more banal, types of action? While in the present instance I have rendered *tulonke* by 'games', the translation 'ceremonies' is at least equally appropriate.<sup>90</sup>

All five texts are admirably composed, packing considerable content into a concise compass. All five have an initial sentence that clearly indicates their topic, and four (all except III) may be considered to have a title – either set apart (text I) or included within the first line. Each also has a clear narrative structure – progressively describing several distinct but related ceremonies (I), presenting a reasoned theological argument (III), or describing – in chronological order – the different steps of a recommended process. Although the vocabulary is restricted and fairly repetitive, it is somehow expressive – perhaps because there is no redundancy of content (with the sole exception of one brief statement, expressed both in Arabic and Manding – V.16–17) – and no banal statements (with the possible exception of I. 23).

<sup>88</sup> See especially Cardaire 1954, 35–46, Royer 1999, Mann 2003.

<sup>89</sup> See, e.g., Launay 1992, 9–76; Weil 1998. In 1994, based on Almamy's statement that 'Tera' and 'Traoré' were alternative pronunciations of the same name, I identified the two groups. This major error must now be corrected. The genealogies and familial lore of the Tera are retraced in an important new book (Thera 2013). Concerning the interpretation of the 'Marka' social category, see e.g. Gallais 1984, 143–171, as well as – with greater attention to the San area – the above-cited articles by Pageard (1961a, 1961b).

<sup>90</sup> The choice made in my initial French translation (1994, 118–119).

## 8 Comparisons and historical inferences

Comparison to other known ‘*ajamī*-s shows that, in terms of phonological representation, this is one of the fullest and most successful devised on the African continent (and perhaps beyond). It also suggests some historical links to other West African ‘*ajamī*-s.

The present system is one of only two Mande ‘*ajamī*-s known to represent five distinct vowels, the other being that of the Mogofin of Guinea (whose islamisation, and associated adoption of an ‘*ajamī*, has been hypothesised to have taken place in the twentieth century).<sup>91</sup> In addition to the standard Arabic diacritics denoting *a*, *i*, and *u*, each of these ‘*ajamī*-s possesses two special signs, respectively denoting *e*, *ε* and *o*, *ɔ*. A recent Mandinka document from Casamance, Senegal, makes only occasional use of a special sign for *o*, and does not have a special sign for *e*.<sup>92</sup>

It would appear that only a minority of Manding ‘*ajamī* documents possess a special sign to denote *e*. W.T. Hamlyn (1934), describing the writing practices of the Mandinka of the Gambia, states (102–103) that *e* was variously indicated by *fathā* or *kasra*, while ‘short *e*’ could be indicated by *sukūn* (which also served to indicate a vowel-less consonant) and ‘long *e*’ by three pyramidally arranged dots. R.T. Addis (1963) states that a dot under the line (which I identify with the *imāla* dot, see more below) was exceptionally used for *e*, but that the use of *kasra*, to designate both *i* and *e*, was more usual; he adds that the dot in question ‘is more common in Wolof’ (p. 9). In the ‘Pakao book’, composed by Mandinka in Casamance, Senegal, c. 1843, *sukūn* is used in certain phonological contexts to denote either *e* or *i*.<sup>93</sup> In the ‘Ta:rikh Mandinka’, a historical document of the Mandinka of Guinea-Bissau, *kasra* is generally used to denote both *i* and *e*, while *sukūn* is used to denote elided *i* and *u*. However, the association of a *kasra* with one of the emphatic Arabic consonants ط *ṭā*, ṭ, ص *ṣād*, ṣ, ض *ḍād*, ḍ (this last often pronounced *l* in West Africa) is used in order to denote *e*; *kasra* after one of the corresponding non-emphatic consonants denotes *i*. Thus, this manner of graph-

<sup>91</sup> Vydrine 1998, 19–21, 2014, 207–208. See N'Daou 1999 for historical background information concerning this group.

<sup>92</sup> Composed in Casamance, Senegal, in 1968; see Sharawy 2005, 453–471. The sign for *o* appears to have originated among the Fulbe of Futa Jalon, see more below. Sharawy also presents documents, both reprinted and hitherto unpublished, concerning several of the other languages discussed here.

<sup>93</sup> Schaffer 1975, 2003, 1–15; Vydrine 1998, 4–15, 46–62, 2014, 215.

ically distinguishing between *i* and *e* is operative in certain restricted phonological contexts only.<sup>94</sup> Louis-Gustave Binger (1886), describing the writing practices of the great merchants of Bamako, Maurice Delafosse (1904), summarising his observations in the northern Ivory Coast, and Coleman Donaldson (2013), describing Jula medical texts he had recently viewed in Bobo-Dioulasso (Burkina Faso), mention the three basic Arabic vowels only.<sup>95</sup>

In contrast, the use of a dot below the line to denote *e* is attested in Fulfulde writings from Futa Jalon (Guinea), Futa Toro (Senegal), northern Nigeria and the Adamawa plateau of Northern Cameroon, Wolof, Hausa, and Old Kanembu.<sup>96</sup> In view of this widespread distribution, it can hardly be doubted that this sign has its source in the *imāla* dot – indicating a *fatha* that is contextually pronounced as *e* – of the Warsh canonical Quranic ‘reading’ system long dominant in the Maghreb and West Africa.<sup>97</sup> This hypothesis is further confirmed by the designations

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**94** Giesing/Vydrine 2007. It is regrettable that only two pages from the original manuscripts are reproduced. The authors’ Arabic typescript (presented in columns parallel to a transcription and a French translation) can in no way substitute for the original documents, whose publication would greatly enhance the value of this ground-breaking work.

**95** Binger 1886, 31–35; Delafosse 1904, 260–261; Donaldson 2013, 29.

**96** See Sow 1971, 202–169 for the photographic reproduction of a manuscript copied in 1935, and the discussion of its dating, 22; BnF Arabic ms. 6851 – Fulfulde marginal annotations to the Arabic text of this late nineteenth century manuscript (in course of detailed study by the present writer); Seydou 2008 – image on cover, reproduced from a Futa Jalon manuscript; Futa Toro: Delafosse/Gaden 1913, 7, 9 (comments on cited Fulfulde words within two late nineteenth-century Arabic manuscripts); Gaden 1935, x: analysis of the writing system of two copies, made before 1930, of a Fulfulde manuscript composed near Segou (Mali) over a nearly thirty-year period, by a Futa Toro author (d. 1911) who had been to Futa Jalon; northern Nigeria: Taylor 1929, 19, 26–31; Adamawa region, Northern Cameroon: Lacroix 1965, vol. 1, 371; Wolof: Addis 1963, Ngom 2010, 16–17, who however states that most of the Wolof ‘*ajamī*’ texts he has examined use the three standard Arabic vowel signs only; Hausa: Migeod 1913, 252–253 (the information about Manding is entirely derived from Delafosse 1904); Taylor *ibid.*; Skinner 1968, 104; Piłascewicz 2000, 43–44, describing the writing system employed by the great Kano-born scholar al-Haji Umaru (c. 1858–1934); Old Kanembu and Tarjumo (its recent, equally scholastic descendant): Bondarev 2014, 114–117. However, an early twentieth-century Hausa manuscript from Ghana (Piłascewicz 1992, 25; the transliterated and translated manuscript is also reproduced in facsimile) uses only the three basic Arabic vowel marks, and the same also seems to be true of the manuscripts presented by Charles Robinson (1896, 1925).

**97** *Warsh*, so named for an early transmitter, is a variant of one of the seven canonical ‘readings’ (*qirā’āt*, i.e. systems of oral recitation) that came to be accepted in the Islamic world. Concerning these readings, see e.g. Leemhuis 2004.

– *yamala*, *yamalere*, *yamalāra* or *yamla* – attributed to it in certain Fulbe and Hausa milieux.<sup>98</sup>

Given its widespread use, it is likely that the author of the San texts was already familiar with this application of the *imāla* dot from Fulfulde writings circulating in the Masina; though it is also conceivable that he personally had recourse to the sign he was familiar with from his Quranic studies. One can understand that West Africans eagerly embraced this sign, which allowed them to better render the vocalic richness of their native languages.

On the other hand, only a few West African ‘*ajamī*’-s have a specific sign for *o*. Several Futa Jalon or Futa Jalon-related texts use a *ḍamma* with a small dot inserted (◌̣).<sup>99</sup> Gaden states that some Futa Toro writers make use of this sign, but more usually, employ unmodified *ḍamma* for both *u* and *o*.<sup>100</sup> Some other Futa Toro manuscripts use *ḍamma* accompanied by three dots to indicate an *o* sign, three superposed dots (◌̣̣̣) being the sign generally used, in this region, to indicate that the pronunciation of a grapheme differs from its usual Arabic value.<sup>101</sup> Most Wolof manuscripts make no special provision for *o*, but a few use a *ḍamma* with a small dot inserted<sup>102</sup> – the sign employed in many Fulfulde manuscripts. The recent Mogofin writing also uses this sign<sup>103</sup>, presumably borrowed from Fulfulde. Materials on Hausa do not mention a special sign to specify *o*. Only one Fulbe scholar from Adamawa – in what appears to be an idiosyncratic usage – employed the same sign as the San writer, i.e. an inverted *ḍamma*, to indicate *o*; other Adamawa scholars did not differentiate between *u* and *o* in their writing.<sup>104</sup> Two Old Kanembu manuscripts use a complex digraph, associating preceding *ḍamma*, *wāw* and *alif* surmounted by *sukūn* to represent final *o*; in all other contexts, as well as in other manuscripts, both *u* and *o* are represented by *ḍamma*.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Sources: Hausa: *yamala* – Taylor 1929, 26; Fulfulde *yamalāre* and *yamalere*: Taylor *ibid.*; Fulfulde *yamla*: Mohamadou 1995–1996.

<sup>99</sup> Sow 1971, 1966, unnumbered photographic plates inserted between pp. 12–13; Seydou 2008, book cover; BnF Arabic ms. 6851.

<sup>100</sup> Gaden 1935.

<sup>101</sup> Delafosse/Gaden 1913, 7–12.

<sup>102</sup> Ngom 2010, 16–17.

<sup>103</sup> Vydrine 1998, 20–21.

<sup>104</sup> Lacroix 1965, vol. 1, 371–372. This sign also happens to be identical to that used by the minority of Swahili scribes who distinguish *o* from *u* (see Allen 1945, 10); but in this instance, the analogy is almost certainly due to a convergence of reasoning rather than historical influence. The same writers use a small vertical stroke below the letter to represent *e*. Swahili ‘*ajamī*’-s successfully represent its different consonants (by adding dots), but usually only three vowels.

<sup>105</sup> Bondarev 2014, 114–117.



It therefore appears likely – pending a fuller investigation of Fulfulde documents from the Masina – that the San writer may have personally devised his representation of this vowel; though he may have been familiar with other graphs for representing this same sound.

Though it has been suggested that certain sign combinations in the San texts denote *ε*, it is more likely that they are calligraphic artefacts.<sup>106</sup>

As with all West African ‘*ajamī*’-s, the San author uses the Arabic letters of prolongation (*ḥurūf al-madd*: *alif*, *wāw*, and *yā*’) to represent long vowels. As with other Manding ‘*ajamī*’-s, he is not completely consistent in representing vocalic length.<sup>107</sup> Some ‘*ajamī*’ writers, but not the San author, attach isolated vowels to ‘*ayn*’ rather than *alif*.<sup>108</sup>

While it is thus apparent that the San author’s vocalic notation system constitutes a distinct improvement on virtually all the other West African systems that have come to light so far – noting five rather than four or just three vowels – one may well ask ‘Why only five rather than all seven Bamana vowels?’ Perhaps the author was influenced, in this respect, by his native Fulfulde, which distinguishes only five phonological vowels, as well as by written French – which also distinguishes five basic vowels.

The San author is also more successful than most West African ‘*ajamī*’ writers in representing the consonants specific to his language.

Thus, W.T. Hamlyn noted in 1934 (102–104) that the Mandinka of the Gambia used a *yā*’ surmounted by three dots (or sometimes only one dot) to denote *n*, and that this sign was borrowed from the Wolof. The ‘Ta:rikh Mandinka’ from Guinea-Bissau either uses a character based on a combination of *nūn* and *yā*’, or simply a *nūn*, thus not graphically differentiating between *n* and *j*.<sup>109</sup> Alfâ Ibrâhîm Sow mentions that the oldest Futa Jalon manuscripts render *n*, as well as *c*, *j*, and several other characters by *ج* *jīm*, *j*;<sup>110</sup> the same is true of the famous *qaṣīda* from Futa Toro.<sup>111</sup> The Futa Toro chronicler (or his copyists) used both *jīm* and *yā*’, surmounted by three dots, to render *n*; moreover, the former character additionally served to represent several other non-Arabic sounds.<sup>112</sup> The Fulfulde of northern Nigeria may use either *jīm* or add an extra dot to this letter.<sup>113</sup> In manuscripts from

<sup>106</sup> See above, p. 219.

<sup>107</sup> See, for example, Vydrine 1998, 9–11.

<sup>108</sup> Hamlyn 1935, 105, Addis 1963, 10.

<sup>109</sup> Giesing/Vydrine 2007, 24.

<sup>110</sup> Sow 1971, 22–23.

<sup>111</sup> Gaden 1935, 9–10.

<sup>112</sup> Delafosse/Gaden 1913, 7–8, 11–12.

<sup>113</sup> Taylor 1929, 35.

Adamawa, *n* may be variously represented by a *jīm*, a *yā'*, or a *nūn* followed by a *yā'*; as will have been remarked, each of these signs also has other values.<sup>114</sup> Wolof uses either *jīm*, or *jīm* surmounted by three dots.<sup>115</sup>

*η*, which the San author represents, in its single occurrence, as a Maghrebi *qāf* with an extra dot, is represented by Senegambian writers as a *nūn* (thus not distinguishing it from *n*) – except in word-final position, where they regularly indicate it by *tanwīn*.<sup>116</sup> The oldest Futa Jalon manuscripts denote this, as well as *g* and several other sounds, by *qāf* (written, Maghrebi-style, with one dot above). The Futa Toro manuscripts may use either this, or *qāf* surmounted by three dots, to represent *g*, *η*, or *n*; additionally, they use *kāf* surmounted by three dots, with the same significations.<sup>117</sup> However, in the Adamawa, *ġ ghayn*, *gh* is used to denote *g*, *η* and *n*.<sup>118</sup> Wolof uses either *ghayn*, *ghayn* with three dots, or *kāf* with three dots; however, the first and last signs may also indicate *g*.<sup>119</sup>

The San writer consistently denotes *g* by dotting *kāf* *ك*. In contrast, the Mandinka writers of the Gambia have used *kāf* to represent both *k* and *g*, while Jula writers from the northern Ivory Coast used either *qāf* or *ghayn* (each of which represented several other sounds as well).<sup>120</sup> Jula manuscripts examined in Bobo-Dioulasso use either *kāf* or *qāf*, apparently for *k* as well as *g*.<sup>121</sup> Older Fulfulde manuscripts from Futa Jalon represented *g* as well as several other sounds by *qāf*; the Futa Toro writers used either a simple *qāf*, or else *kāf* or *qāf* surmounted by three dots (all of which may also stand for other sounds); whereas the Adamawa writers use *ghayn* for this and several other sounds.<sup>122</sup> The Fulfulde and Hausa of northern Nigeria use *ghayn*.<sup>123</sup> Transliterated African words, cited within the Arabic text of the manuscripts edited under the title of *Ta'rikh al-Fattāsh*, use *kāf* surmounted by three dots as well as *qāf* and *ghayn*.<sup>124</sup> The San writer's grapheme is comparable to the Persian *ك*, also representing *g*; the Persian character adds a stroke to the basic Arabic character whereas the San author adds a dot.

114 Lacroix 1965, vol. 1, 372.

115 Ngom 2010, 14.

116 Hamlyn 1935, 102; Schaffer 1975; Giesing/Vydrin 2007, 24–25.

117 Sow 1971, 22–23; Delafosse/Gaden 1913, 7–8, 11–12; Gaden 1935, 9–10.

118 Lacroix 1965, vol. 1, 372.

119 Ngom 2010, 13–15.

120 Addis 1963, 5, 8; Delafosse 1904, 260.

121 Donaldson 2013, 29.

122 Sow 1971, 22; Delafosse/Gaden 1913, 10–12; Gaden 1935; Lacroix 1965, vol. 1, 372.

123 Migeod 1913, 252; Taylor 1929, 24–25, 43.

124 'Introduction' xv–xvi; there are numerous examples of this special character in Houdas/Delafosse 1981 (first ed.: 1913), for example on pp. 68, 215.

/c/ is the one consonant for which the San writer did not find an unequivocal representation, using ت *tā'*, *t*, also employed for the frequent Bamana phoneme /t/. The 'Ta:rikkh Mandinka' manuscripts from Guinea-Bissau are said to use the same character for *c* and *n*.<sup>125</sup> Older Fulfulde manuscripts ambiguously use *jīm* to represent this as well as *j*, *n*, and several other sounds. Futa Toro manuscripts may in addition use ش *shīn*, *sh* – perhaps the regular practice in some Adamawa manuscripts.<sup>126</sup> Wolof manuscripts use either *jīm* or *jīm* surmounted by three dots – each of which also has several other values.<sup>127</sup> Hausa may use ث *tha'*, *th*.<sup>128</sup>

Whereas the San writer systematically uses *jīm* to note *j*, many other 'ajamī writers prefer ځ *dhāl*, *dh*, or use both concurrently.<sup>129</sup> The Bobo-Dioulasso manuscripts, which systematically employ *jīm* for *c*, correlatively employ *dhāl* for *j*.<sup>130</sup>

Unlike many other West African 'ajamī writers, the San author does not alternately use two or more Arabic letters to represent a single African consonant sound. As demonstrated above, whenever he provides two (or more rarely three) alternative spellings for a given word, this corresponds to observable pronunciation variants.

All the consonants employed by the San author in writing Bamana also exist in Fulfulde (which, furthermore, has several additional consonant phonemes).

As indicated above, the San writer does not indicate tone. Old Kanembu is, as far as is known, the only African 'ajamī to indicate tone, in certain consonantal contexts only.<sup>131</sup> On the other hand, the N'ko writing system devised by Souleymane Kanté in the 1940s, initially for the Maninka of northern Guinea, does provide an adequate representation of tone (equivalent to or better than that of most current Latin-based transcriptions).<sup>132</sup>

Alfā Ibrāhīm Sow states that an orthographic 'reform' took place in the Futa Jalon in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and implies that further efforts at refinement were pursued well into the twentieth century.<sup>133</sup> On the basis of an

<sup>125</sup> Giesing/Vydrine 2007, 24, Vydrin 2014, 210.

<sup>126</sup> Sow 1971, 22; Delafosse/Gaden 1913, 12; Lacroix 1965, vol. 1, 372.

<sup>127</sup> Ngom 2010, 15.

<sup>128</sup> Migeod 1913, 251; Skinner 1968, 101.

<sup>129</sup> Jula of northern Ivory Coast: Delafosse 1904, 260; Mandinka of Guinea-Bissau: Giesing/Vydrine 2007, 24; Fulfulde of Futa Toro: Delafosse/Gaden 1913, 11.

<sup>130</sup> Donaldson 2013, 29.

<sup>131</sup> Bondarev 2014, 214–217.

<sup>132</sup> Concerning the social and historical background of the N'ko movement, see especially Amelle 2001; Oyler 2005. For the practical notation of tones, see the various manuals published by the N'ko organisation.

<sup>133</sup> Sow 1971, 22–23.

examination of manuscript colophons, as well as authors' biographies, David Robinson has argued that followers of al-Hajj Umar became acquainted with Fulfulde '*ajamī*' in Futa Jalon, whence they brought it to Segu, the Masina and Futa Toro.<sup>134</sup> Shared features of Fulfulde and Wolof '*ajamī*-s suggest that the former has significantly influenced the latter.

It is thus clear that the San writer's orthography is superior, at least in phonological terms, to the other Manding, as well as to the Wolof, Fulfulde and Hausa '*ajamī*-s described so far – though the two latter are associated with substantial literatures. In terms of vocalic representation, it may also be superior to Persian, Ottoman Turkish and Swahili, which do not regularly represent either *e* or *o* (though both exist in these languages). The fact that these cultures refer to Quranic 'readings' that do not recognise the *e* sound may explain why they do not have a special sign for this phoneme. The Persian گ *g* may be the source of the Swahili character with the same shape and value.

Paradoxically, then, the apparently isolated (as far as current knowledge goes) texts from San present in certain respects a better writing system than several great, centuries-old literatures. This surely reflects the author's perspicacity, but probably also a familiarity with Fulfulde '*ajamī*' and with written French.

## 9 Summary

Amadou Jomworo Bary, the author of the five San texts, was a traditionally-trained itinerant Fulbe scholar from the village of Penga in the Masina (Mali) who lived c. 1890–1960; he assumed significant social responsibilities as a teacher and as chief of Penga, and had at least some contacts with the French administration. Two of the five texts that have come down to us express what he believed were some of the most fundamental points in Muslim belief and practice. All the texts demonstrate his deep conviction as to the omnipotence and omniscience of the One Sovereign Lord, in conformity with Asharite theology. Although Amadou Jomworo Bary undertook missionising tours among non-Muslims in the San area, and several of the texts appear to have been written with proselytising or pedagogical intent, he apparently perceived no contradiction between the rituals held at San's sacred well and lake and his own Muslim belief. His remedies, which involve the use of plant and animal substances as well as the recitation of set formulas, fall well within the sphere of Malian Maliki belief and practice.

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<sup>134</sup> Robinson 1982, 252–255; see also Kane/Robinson 1994, 385–387.

Given that Fulfulde *‘ajamī* is now known to have been used in the Masina (possibly introduced or reinforced by persons who had been to Futa Jalon), it is likely that this was a major factor inspiring him to compose these Bamana texts. His writing system successfully represents five of Bamana’s seven vowels (*a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u* – but does not make a distinction between *e* and *ɛ*, *o* and *ɔ*), and three of the four characteristic Bamana consonants (shared, moreover, with Fulfulde) that appear in these texts: *ɲ*, *ŋ* and *g*, but not *c*.<sup>135</sup> His system thus appears to be, phonologically, one of the most accurate *‘ajamī*-s used or devised by traditionally-trained Muslim scholars to have come to light so far in West Africa. Nevertheless, there are some ambiguous passages, primarily due to inconsistencies in the notation of vocalic length and in punctuation, and the absence of any notation for tone. Amadou Jomworo Bary was probably familiar, from *‘ajamī* writings circulating in the Masina, with the *imāla* dot representing *e*. Research is required on the Fulfulde *‘ajamī* of the Masina in order to ascertain the extent to which Amadou Jomworo Bary may have adopted existing characters and/or devised new ones. It is likely that his awareness of French writing practices contributed significantly to his success in representing Bamana.

Perhaps a desire to have documents – meant as records or aids? – in the very same language he was using in preaching and healing, explains his decision to write in Bamana in preference to the other languages available to him, including his native Fulfulde.

Comparison to other West African *‘ajamī*-s makes apparent just how understudied the subject of *‘ajamī* orthography is, and how sketchy the information available. It also suggests that most West African *‘ajamī* writers hesitated to introduce new characters to note sounds specific to their own languages – perhaps out of reverence for Arabic writing.

The process of researching and analysing these texts, which in my case now extends over twenty years, makes apparent the importance of fieldwork and a knowledge of the cultural context for understanding and interpretation. While comments by any one informant may sometimes be misleading, many issues can be resolved through further fieldwork. The crucial importance of fieldwork will become even more apparent in the critique of some alternative interpretations of these texts, presented as an appendix.

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<sup>135</sup> *P* is the sole (and quite rare) Bamana consonantal phoneme not to appear in these texts; Fulfulde has only five vowels, but several additional consonants.

## 10 Appendix: A critique of Vydrin and Dumestre's analyses

The study recently published by Valentin Vydrin and Gérard Dumestre (2014) of these same texts is marred by a surprising number of misreadings as well as an inadequate analysis of the graphic system employed. The high reputation of these two scholars, as well as their bizarre omission of any mention of my work published twenty years earlier – and of the transliteration and translation I personally provided Dumestre, at his request, in 1989 – obliges me to discuss the points of divergence in some detail.

### 10.1 Writing system

With respect to the systematic overview of the graphic system provided on pp. 245-246, it is necessary to make the following remarks.

The two authors did not realise (240, 246) that the character ق (identical to an Oriental *qāf*; III.15) represented *η* (or possibly *ng*), and instead assumed that it represented *g* – though this sound is systematically noted, elsewhere in these texts, by a *kāf* surmounted by a dot.<sup>136</sup>

The 'ayn the authors think they see in II.15, 'with its meaning remaining unclear' (237, 246), is in fact a *hamza* written on the line, preceding the *alif* to which it is associated. This *hamza* is a common feature of West African calligraphy, ultimately deriving from early Maghrebi models. The authors' error is particularly surprising, given that *āmīn* ('Amen') is one of the most basic elements of the Islamic religious vocabulary.

The authors assume (245) that *z* 'is used representing *j*'. While it is indeed true that *jaga* and *jaka* are the most common Bamana pronunciations of the term designating Islamic alms, scholars (and some others) often pronounce *zaka*. Surely, it is this scholarly pronunciation that the writer wished to represent.

The authors believe they see (239, 244, 246) a *yā* 'with three subscript dots in III.8 and in V.15. As regards the first case, a likely explanation is that the writer (or copyist) has attached two vowels – *ḍamma* as well as the dot representing *e* – to the same consonant ductus; one could then read this script unit (as proposed above) *yeḡnumawnyē*, ... *ye* ... *numanw* ... *ye* (*ye*...*ye* being a formula expressing the

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<sup>136</sup> The table on 245 has a Maghrebi rather than an Oriental *qāf*. This is, presumably, a typographical error.

identity of two terms). In the second case, it is likely that the dot of the initial *nūn* (here figuring, in my view, as a constitutive unit of the composite grapheme representing *n*) was erroneously placed below rather than on top of *nūn* (probably by the copyist rather than the original writer). In West African calligraphies, *nūn* is generally provided with a dot in initial and medial positions; but it is often (and in some texts and regions, systematically) omitted in word-final position. The inconsistency with which *nūn* is dotted (or not) may well reflect the influence that Almamy's extensive perusal of both manuscripts and printed books had on his calligraphy. As far as I can tell on visual grounds, the letter in III.8 is provided with a superscript dot. The fact that both these recurrent terms are spelled – in immediate proximity and elsewhere in these texts – using the letter that Vydrin, Dumestre and I all recognise as representing *n*, strongly suggests that the issues here relate to practical calligraphy rather than to the graphic representation of phonemes.

The authors claim (235, 245-246) that in I.22, *yā'* represents *n*. However, the term generally spelled *siyen* or *siɲɛ*, in Mali's official orthography, is sometimes pronounced without medial nasalisation (as the first-mentioned spelling, in fact, implies). It is likely that the writer wished to represent this pronunciation, rather than the strongly nasalised pronunciation noted elsewhere in these five texts. Of course, it is also possible that the writer or copyist merely forgot to mark the *nūn*.

These errors lead Vydrin and Dumestre to consider that the San author's writing system is far less coherent than it actually is. Whereas I noted that a single sign is used to represent both /t/ and /c/ (a point also made by Vydrin and Dumestre), they additionally posit that /j/ and /g/ are each represented by two different characters, while *n* is represented by three different characters.

## 10.2 Arabic and Arabic-derived vocabulary

The two authors fail to identify the two Arabic words, used for their Arabic meaning values, present in the text:

- *ay* (I.12), 'that is' (a particle employed primarily or exclusively in the written language, and a perfect synonym of the homophonous i.e., *id est*);
- *tammāt* (V.18), 'the end' (very literally, 'it is over'; 3<sup>rd</sup> person fem. sing. perfective form of the verbal root *tmm*).

These terms, which Vydrin and Dumestre signal by question marks in their transcriptions, are left untranslated. Furthermore, the second script unit is transliterated *tt*, as the authors did not notice the medial *mīm*. (See 233 and 244.)

Moreover, the two linguists treat deviations from Arabic spelling, in Bamana words of Arabic etymology, as a failure, perhaps due to ignorance: ‘The author of these texts makes an effort to maintain the original orthography in Arabic loanwords, although he does not always succeed [...]’ (248). They then advance an alternative hypothesis: ‘In any case, the author writes Arabic loanwords which have undergone phonological changes following Bamana Ajami orthographic tradition...’ (ibid.). Perhaps they mean ‘phonological changes in the course of adaptation and integration to Bamana speech’; pending the discovery and analysis of additional texts, one can hardly speak of a ‘Bamana Ajami orthographic tradition’.

They do not seem to recognise that, in general, the San author strove to write Bamana words, including those of Arabic etymology, in accordance with what he perceived to be their usual, to some degree contextually variable, pronunciations; but that with respect to certain key elements of religious vocabulary – signalled by the use of consonants appropriate to Arabic only – he wished to indicate a specifically scholarly pronunciation.

### 10.3 Transcriptions and translations

The inaccurate interpretation of the alphabetic signs employed in the manuscripts inevitably results in several misreadings. Additional misreadings are due to insufficient familiarity with certain cultural domains. For reasons of space, only the most obvious and egregious examples can be listed here.

In III.15, the misinterpretation of *η* as *g* has led the authors to read the word in which it occurs as *kɔgɔra*, ‘to have reached maturity’. In an attempt to confer some plausibility to this reading, the second-last letter of the word, which had been correctly transliterated as *nūn*, *n*, is transcribed as *rā*, *r* (240). (The last syllable of the word corresponds to the perfective ending *-ra/la/na*, the consonant sound being conditioned by the previous syllable; *-na* occurs in nasal contexts only.) I read this word as *koŋonā*, *kɔŋɔna*, ‘to have gone hungry’.

This choice of reading also leads the authors to misinterpret a following word. *Fāra* is taken to mean *faara*, ‘killed’ (usually written *fagara* in the official orthography, which privileges the longest form; verbal root: *faga*), rather than *fara* (verbal root: *fa*, ‘to be sated’) – even though the following sentences concern various bodily states (standing, sitting, sleeping).

In I.14 and 15, *tāyā*, *caya*, ‘to increase’, is read as *taa na*, to ‘advance’ or ‘get ahead’ (234). Although the authors correctly note (in Table 1) that *tā*, *t* serves to



denote both /t/ and /c/, they fail to recognise the latter value here. This furthermore leads them to arbitrarily transcribe as *ɲ* the character which they had correctly transliterated as *y*.

The authors also experience difficulties in the lexical interpretation of items that are acceptably transliterated and transcribed. Thus, in IV.4, the authors (241) misunderstand a key term relating to the natural environment. Implicitly interpreting *gōkun* as a compound word, they transcribe it as *gōkun*, and hesitate between identifying it with the beans of the plant that Charles Bailleul – by far the foremost lexical authority on Bamana – transcribes as *ngɔ* (furthermore defining it as a variety of *Canavalia ensiformis*), and *nkokun*, ‘head of a species of locust’. In fact, the reference is clearly to the water lily (*Nymphaea lotus*, and perhaps one or more other, closely related species), whose Bamana designation Bailleul spells *nkɔku*, and whose pods constitute a major, and highly appreciated, source of food in many regions of Mali.<sup>137</sup> Although the beans of the creeper *ngɔ* are widely used for decorative purposes, in divination and as good-luck charms (as noted by Bailleul and confirmed by my fieldwork), the variety found in Mali is never used as a nutrient and may in fact be poisonous.<sup>138</sup>

It is the religious vocabulary, however, that poses the greatest challenge to the two authors – despite the fact that – with a single exception – these texts use only those terms familiar to most contemporary, Bamana-speaking Muslims (as distinct from the highly complex, technical lexicon specific to scholars).<sup>139</sup>

These problems are especially marked with respect to text III (238–240), an exposition of the elements of Muslim religious doctrine.

Line 1. As noted above, *ṣalīla*, *salīla*, the perfective form of the verb generally pronounced *ɔli* in contemporary Bamana, is borrowed from the Arabic *ṣallā* (root *ṣlw*), referring to the practice of pronouncing the blessing upon the Prophet, *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa-sallama*. Vydrin and Dumestre translate it by ‘greeting’. This

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**137** This plant is cited by Pierre Garnier (1976, 23, 37; 1986, 188), who also mentions that it is used as food.

**138** The lexical items *ngɔ*, *nko* (‘variété de criquet’) and *nkɔku* are discussed in Bailleul 2007, 324, 332, 333 respectively. With reference to a human or animal body, *kun* usually designates the head, but in some other contexts, and especially in composition, it may mean ‘unit’ (cf. Bailleul 252). These various terms are also mentioned in Dumestre’s dictionary 2011, 587–588, 749, 763. Thoyer-Rozat 1979, 129, 131 does, however, mention that a decoction of the leaves of the *ngɔ* plant may be used as a remedy for headache. Berhaut 1976, vol. 5, 80–82 mentions that in Senegal, the macerated leaves are used as a cure for oedema. He also states that the unripe beans – more especially the white ones – may be eaten, but that the ripe ones are poisonous.

**139** This vocabulary has been studied by the present writer, most recently in 2013a. The exception referred to here is *iḥsān* / *ɲumanya* (see above, 232).

also leads our authors to interpret the term transliterated *an* as *ani*, ‘and’ (whereas the intended meaning, in my opinion, is, as spelled, *an*, ‘our’).

Line 2. *hine ni kisi b’a kan* is (as seen above) the Bamana formula corresponding to the Arabic one calling God’s blessings upon His ultimate Messenger, Muhammad; this phrase is misleadingly and blasphemously (from an Islamic perspective) translated as ‘Muhammad, he is merciful and he is the Saviour’.

Line 3. The authors acknowledge that they do not understand the syntax, and fail to recognise the term *tijebato* – ‘true worship, true faith’. Correlatively, they misinterpret the verbal sequence *ma ke*, ‘has not’, as the compound term *make* (male lord).<sup>140</sup> The term *samasen* (l. 3), referring to the ‘pillars’ of Islam – as well as to pillars or other supporting elements in architecture – is inaccurately and inelegantly rendered by ‘buttresses’.<sup>141</sup>

Line 4. As a correlate of their previous choices, and because they furthermore did not recognise the presence, in this line, of the sequence *fo ni ... ye* (a standard Bamana formula expressing exception), the authors interpret *fo* to mean ‘say’ rather than ‘except’ (the words are homophonous). Moreover, they do not realise that in this passage, the San scholar has in effect translated the Muslim credo from Arabic into Bamana – further blurring their interpretation.

Line 6. The initial element of *nisebāye* is bizarrely interpreted as *n’i* (presumably the contraction of *ni i*, ‘if you’), whereas a simple *ni* (‘if’) would be grammatically more appropriate. Correlatively, the co-authors translate the beginning of this line ‘to make *haji* if you can’, whereas it means quite precisely ‘to perform the *haji* pilgrimage if you have the necessary (material) means’.

Line 8, the co-authors apparently do not know that *tijetigiya* is the word, employed by Muslims, Christians, and at least some adherents of traditional religions, meaning ‘to believe (in a religious truth or doctrine)’; thus they translate it on the basis of its etymological components only.

Line 17. After having inexplicably transliterated the script unit that I read *nigudeyē* as *nigub yē*, which they interpret as *ni ko bee ye*, an expression that would normally mean ‘with all things / everything’, they blasphemously (from an Islamic perspective) translate the passage in question as ‘man should know that God is everything’. *Bange*, later in the same line, is rendered by ‘Creator’.

<sup>140</sup> The constitutive elements of this term are *ma*, ‘lord’, and *ke*, a compositional suffix denoting the quality of being male. The term *make* is most usually employed with reference to a political superior, or by a wife with respect to her husband. The term *ma*, on its own, may refer either to God or to a political superior.

<sup>141</sup> In the same vein (l. 5), the co-authors employ the term ‘Lent’ to refer to the Ramadan fast.

whereas the reference is to what God has made manifest (i.e., certain aspects of the Creation).

Their interpretation of text II (236–237), dealing with religiously required ablutions, also includes several problematic interpretations.

II.8. *Numabolo*, though it can indeed mean – as the co-authors have translated – ‘left hand’, in this context refers to the entire left side of the body.

II.10. Not realising that the writer is not a native speaker, the authors interpret the sequence *i k tonnā* as *i koton na*, ‘the lower part of your back’, whereas, as has been seen, the reference is to the nape of the neck. In this case, their attempt to reconstruct a grammatically perfect sentence (for the *ka* possessive marker should not normally be used with a part of the body) has led to a contextually implausible interpretation.

II.13. Confusingly for their translation, the co-authors make no distinction between the ablutions (*wuḍūʿ*), which purify the worshipper from minor pollution, and the major ablutions or ‘washing’ (*ghusl*), which purify him or her from major pollution (*janāba*).<sup>142</sup> Consequently, they mistranslate the acceptably transcribed *a bʿi wasa seliji la* as ‘the ablution water has sufficed you’, rather than ‘this [manner of washing] also suffices as ablution.’<sup>143</sup> They are apparently also not aware that the Bamana term *seliji* may refer not only to the water used in ablutions, but also to the process of performing them. The San author’s point is that the procedure he has described fulfils the requirements for both the minor and the major ablutions.

Finally, l. 14, the co-authors translate the phrase that both they and I reconstitute as *min fɔra Ala sira la*, as signifying ‘that were mentioned in God’s way’, whereas the reference, of course, is to the prescriptions of the Shariah, most usually designated, in Bamana, by the expression *Ala ka sira*<sup>144</sup>.

In Text IV, l. 14, *Ala ko*, ‘God has said’ (i.e., commanded), is translated ‘Provided that’ (242).

<sup>142</sup> See e.g., ‘Abd Allāh b. Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī’s *Risāla*, a treatise on *fiqh* which serves as a basic reference throughout West Africa: chapters II–V (28–45 of the bilingual Arabic-French edition; English translation: Kenny 1992, on-line). (Maghrebi author, life dates: c. 922–996.)

<sup>143</sup> The second term could also be reconstituted as the predicative marker *bi*, without the direct object pronoun *i*, as a passive construction giving the phrase a somewhat more general meaning (see above). Readings both with and without the direct object pronoun are acceptable and result in only a slight nuance of meaning.

<sup>144</sup> Literally, ‘in God’s path’; *sira* is a loanword from the Quranic *ṣirāṭ*. The Shariah (*Sharīʿa*) is also designated, in Bamana, using the adapted pronunciation *s(h)ariya* (a term which may, by extension, also be applied to the laws of a state).

L. 15, *fura ka ke ni kalan ye ni yiri ye* is bizarrely translated as ‘the medicine is applied according to the instructions and with a reason’.

L. 16, *ni masa sɔnna min ye Ala ye*, is rendered (in incomprehensible English) as ‘if Lord agrees, for God’, although the first three words are a standard Bamana expression, corresponding to the Arabic *in shā’ Allāh*, ‘if God wills’.

There are also various other dubious or erroneous interpretations.

In Text I.10, both the transcription of *kā giyeyā* as *ka janya*, and its translation as ‘move away’, seem arbitrary.

In I.15, the co-authors translate *masaw* as ‘rulers’. Although this was also my initial translation, in 1994, I now believe that the interpretation ‘elders’ is far more likely (see above, p. 230).

In IV.11, the co-authors have misread *fara* as *haera*, corresponding to *herɛ*. (It is true that the calligraphy of the initial letter – there seems to have been some scratching – is particularly poor, but the dot of the Maghrebi *fā’*, below the letter, as well as a *fatḥa* above the letter, are clearly present.) Consequently, they have translated the phrase to which it belongs as ‘be reassured with it’. The word in fact reads *fara*, which in this context, is probably the root form of the verbo-nominal meaning ‘to add’ (see above, 247, n. 68).

In V.7 (243), the co-authors interpret the well-transliterated *min bii ka buluw la* as *min b’i kan buluw la*, ‘that you have in foliage’. However, it is more likely that the *ka* corresponds to an unidiomatic use of the possessive marker than to the postposition *kan*.

To conclude this section: it is odd that, though the person described in Almamy’s notes as the manuscripts’ author has a typically Fulbe name (Amadou Bary), it never occurred to Vydrin and Dumestre that he might be a non-native speaker of Bamana, nor to scrutinize the texts for unusual or unidiomatic expressions. Rather, the co-authors seem to view these texts as a purely internal product of Bamana Muslim culture: ‘[...] the very first sample of the authentic Bamana writing tradition published. They come from San, an ancient commercial center in the southwestern [*sic*] part of Mali, and may well represent the earliest piece ever of authentic Bamana literature’ (226).

## 10.4 Collection of the texts

In the introduction to their article, Vydrin and Dumestre state: ‘In 1972, during one of his sojourns in Mali, Gérard Dumestre dispatched a friend of his, Almamy Malik Yattara, to the ancient commercial town of San to look for old Bamana manuscripts’ (231). However, when Gérard Dumestre solicited me for work on these

manuscripts, shortly after I defended my doctoral thesis in 1988, he told me that he ‘was given’ the manuscripts (‘on me les a donnés’).

Almamy Maliki Yattara, whom I questioned about the texts in 1992, specifically denied that he had collected them for Gérard Dumestre. He stated that he had obtained them in the course of fieldwork for an architect (who was, however, more interested in architectural drawings); he remembered the architect’s name as ‘Bernard Léger’, without, however, being absolutely sure of this. This provenance, as well as transmission by Gérard Dumestre, are indicated in the liminary note to my 1994 article. My attempts to identify the person who commissioned Almamy, through enquiries in Mali and more recently by searches on the internet, have so far remained unsuccessful.

In any case, it is incredible that, supposing Gérard Dumestre had any kind of working or personal relationship with Almamy, whether at the time the manuscripts were copied or afterwards, he never asked Almamy to read the texts aloud to him, nor enquired about their interpretation in any way. It is furthermore incredible that Gérard Dumestre would not know that Bory Bary was one of Almamy’s closest friends from youth, when they had roomed together in Mopti. Almamy was able to surmise that Bory Bary might have interesting manuscripts, and copy them, because he was one of the latter’s closest friends – not merely because he was ‘a Muslim cleric’.

It is extremely regrettable that Gérard Dumestre, who has been in Mali every year since the late 1960s, never attempted to interview Bory Bary nor visit San – at a time when such research could have been highly fruitful, and a photographic record of the original manuscripts obtained.

## 10.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, Valentin Vydrin and Gérard Dumestre’s brief article is an object lesson in the importance of fieldwork, of cultural understanding and of local knowledge – as well as of an interdisciplinary approach – for the comprehension and interpretation of any discourse; and of what can go wrong when these are absent.

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# Arabic and Swahili Documents from the Pre-Colonial Congo and the EIC (Congo Free State, 1885–1908): Who were the Scribes?

**Abstract:** A series of Arabic and Swahili documents dating back to the last decades of the nineteenth century and produced in what is today the democratic Republic of Congo are stored in several museums and archives in Belgium. They mainly consist of letters, lists, contracts and agreements, but also religious books and amulets. These documents raise many questions about the identity and the function of their authors: most of them were working as secretaries and translators, but in some cases they were also military chiefs or religious men. They also came from different geographical backgrounds : Arab and Swahili traders, local people, but also Sudanese, Chadians, Comorians, etc.

## 1 Introduction

Many documents written in Arabic, or in Swahili with the Arabic script have been produced in the Congo (Uele, Eastern Congo, Maniema, Marungu and Katanga) since the 1860s, when the Omani and Swahili traders started to settle in the Eastern Congo, and when Sudanese traders arrived in the Azande kingdoms. I will focus here on the documents produced between c. 1860 and 1908, which was the end of the Congo Free State (EIC, Etat Indépendant du Congo). The vast majority of these documents have not been preserved, and only a few of them can still be found in various Belgian museums and archives: the Royal Museum of Central Africa (Tervuren), the Museum of the Army (Brussels), the African Archives (Brussels) and the University of Liège Library. They consist mainly of Swahili treaties written in Marungu between 1884 and 1885, Arabic and Swahili letters and Arabic prayer books from the Azande kingdoms, written between 1897 and 1899, printed copies of the Quran, some handwritten prayer books, two *lawḥa* (wooden boards generally used to learn the Quran) found in Redjaf in the 1890s, dozens of Swahili and Arabic letters and contracts from the Stanley Falls and Maniema written between 1884 and 1893, printed *juz'* in Arabic found in Kasongo and Lukila in 1893, a printed book of

astrology in Arabic found in the Eastern Congo (no date), flags with Arabic inscriptions, and amulets.<sup>1</sup>

Some other documents coming from the Congo are also located in the archives of the Foreign Office, in London, as well as in the French colonial archives. One could expect to find new data *in situ*, in Congolese mosques for example, as well as in personal and familial archives in the Congo and abroad, though no survey has yet been done. However, both the European and the Swahili sources show that the existing documents are just the tip of the iceberg: in his autobiography, Ḥamad bin Muḥammad al-Murjabī, generally nicknamed Tippo Tip (c. 1840–1905) – a famous Swahili trader who used to travel in the Congo – often mentions the letters he used to send and to receive. This includes letters sent from as far as Tabora or even Zanzibar<sup>2</sup>, and many European sources mention the frequent use of Arabic correspondence among the Sudanese, Omani and Swahili traders, as we shall see below. When the Belgian officer Louis N. Chaltin took the city of Redjaf, in February 1897, he found an important quantity of documents in Arabic, left by the Mahdist administration.<sup>3</sup> He asked four Egyptian traders who were in the city to translate these documents, a process that lasted two weeks...<sup>4</sup>

The historical sources also show that Arabic and *‘ajamī* documents have been produced in areas other than the Eastern Congo and the Azande kingdoms, where Swahili and Arab traders settled. For example, Charles Swan, a missionary who stayed in Garenganzwe, the capital of Msiri’s kingdom, between 1890 and 1893, writes about the presence of Arab traders in the capital, and he mentions the use of Arabic writing there.<sup>5</sup> In 1895, another European missionary, Frederic Arnot, who visited the city at the same period, confirms this fact.<sup>6</sup> Though still largely understudied, the local Arabic and Swahili documents should change the way we perceive the history of precolonial and colonial Congo. Firstly, it means that literacy was not introduced into the area by the Europeans, though this is still the dominant idea circulating in the literature about the history of the Congo. Secondly, they give us useful information about trade – some letters mention goods imported into the

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1 Luffin 2004a, 149–170; 2004b, 145–177; 2007a, 186–215.

2 Bontinck 1974, 66, 99.

3 Redjaf, now in Southern Sudan, was the main city of Lado, which remained under the control of the EIC until 1910.

4 MRAC, Fond Chaltin, papiers Chaltin, RG 997/RG 1078, cahier 18, quoted in John Claeys, *Histoire de l'enclave de Lado, 1890–1910* (Brussels: Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2013), 46–49 [MA Thesis, unpublished].

5 Swan, quoted by Verbeken 1956, 120.

6 Arnot 1893, 59.

Congo from outside, others deal with the ivory trade – as well as politics.<sup>7</sup> For example, a letter written by ‘Ali b. Sālim b. Mājid al-Hirāsī in 1893 mentions the war against the Mutetela chief Ngongo Lutete, an important event in what has been called the ‘Arab campaign’, the war between the EIC and the Arabs and Swahili in the Congo.<sup>8</sup> Thirdly, they also show how European, Arab-Swahili and local diplomacy worked in the area, since some of the preserved documents were directly sent to European officers by Swahili and Arab traders, or even by local chiefs. Finally, they are precious documents for the linguist, since many Arabic documents make use of dialectal Arabic.

These documents raise many questions about their authors: can we learn something about the identity of the authors? Did they come from the Congo or from outside? Where did they learn the Arabic script? Was Arabic their mother tongue? What were their official jobs and their social status? Were they occasional or full time scribes? Did literacy diffuse from the offices of the Arab-Swahili traders and Arab secretaries to the general population? For what types of communication was literacy used: commercial, diplomatic, religious? And if so, through what types of interaction? The documents themselves give us some information about the identity of the authors, but we have to focus mainly on the European sources (memoirs, travelogues, official reports, personal archives, etc.) and the local historical sources (Tippo Tip’s autobiography or Maisha (see note 2), for instance) in order to recount the careers of some of these scribes coming from Sudan, the Middle East, the Swahili Coast, the Comoro Islands or the Congo itself, working for traders, local chiefs and European officers.

## 2 Geographical and historical background

The first Muslim communities settled roughly at the same period in the Eastern and in the Northern Congo, during the 1860s. Regarding the Eastern part of the Congo, they were Arab (mainly Omani) and Swahili traders coming from the Eastern Coast of Africa, ruled at that time by the Omani Sultan of Zanzibar. During the early nineteenth century, Zanzibar had developed its trade with the African hinterland, going deeper and deeper into the continent, so that around 1850 the Muslim traders had reached the area of the Great Lakes, and around 1858 they had established a well-organized station in Ujiji, on the eastern shore of Lake Tanganyika. In the 1860s,

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7 MRAC Historical Archives, Archives Rom, R. G. 1072, document no. 1.

8 MRAC Historical Archives, Archives Rom, R. G. 1072, document no. 4.

they had crossed the Lake and had started to found new settlements in the Maniema, their main stations being Kasongo, Kabambare and Nyangwe. Later on they went northward and they reached Kirundu and the Stanley-Falls, around 1882–1883. Among the numerous Arab-Swahili traders were the famous Tippo Tip (Ḥamad bin Muḥammad al-Murjabī in Arabic), his brother Muḥammad bin Saʿīd al-Murjabī alias Bwana Nzige, as well as Ḥāmid bin ʿAlī alias Kibonge and Muḥammad bin Khalfān alias Rumaliza.<sup>9</sup> These traders were in search of ivory and slaves, as well as other goods like copal, gum, palm-oil, parrots, etc.; they also introduced new goods in the area like fabrics, coffee, certain kinds of fruit-tree, etc. Progressively, their commercial network gave them more and more political power, and their influence became ever stronger. The local population was composed of various Bantu-speaking kingdoms and chiefdoms, like the Bangu Bangu, the Basongye, the Bakusu, the Bazula, the Benyemamba, the Batetela, the Basongola and the Barega.<sup>10</sup> Part of the local population was attracted to the culture of the newcomers and adopted some of their customs: they started to dress like them, they converted to Islam, they adopted the Swahili language. They were called Wangwana in Swahili, as opposed to the Washenzi (literally the ‘Savages’), a term used in Swahili for the local Bantu population.

Regarding the North, the Muslim traders of the Uele were Arabs and Nubians coming mainly from Sudan, but there were also Arabs from Egypt and Chad. As in the east, they were mainly in search of ivory and slaves. Later, Muslim Africans from other areas of Sudan also joined them, mainly as soldiers. When they arrived in the Uele around the years 1860, they met with the Azande, a population speaking an Adamawa-Ubangi language.<sup>11</sup> There were other populations, politically and culturally under the influence of the Azande, such as the Nzakara, the Abandiya, the Amadi and the Avungara. The first contacts between the Muslim traders and the Azande were of different kinds. The chief Ngange for instance decided to trade with them, his brother Surūr worked for a Sudanese trader named ʿAbd al-Ṣamad<sup>12</sup>, the chief Bazingbi married off one of his daughters to a trader called Idrīs<sup>13</sup> and so did the chief Tikima to Zubayr, a Jaʿālī Arab originating from Khartoum.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, Ndoruma and Wando fiercely resisted the Arab traders who were forced to withdraw to their forts called *zarāʾib*.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ceulemans 1959, 42.

<sup>10</sup> Vansina 1965, 248.

<sup>11</sup> Evans-Pritchard 1971, 70.

<sup>12</sup> Thuriaux-Hennebert 1964, 34.

<sup>13</sup> Evans-Pritchard 1971, 290.

<sup>14</sup> Gray 1961, 69.

<sup>15</sup> Thuriaux-Hennebert 1964, 36.



During the 1870s, the Egyptian government took the decision to control the Bahr el-Ghazal and the activities of the slave- and ivory-traders. The authorities sent emissaries to the area, and some chiefs such as Tikima, Sasa, Semio or Wando became the allies of the traders. Around 1880, Ndoruma, Sasa, Semio and Rafay, among other Azande chiefs, started to serve the Egyptian authorities and their European representatives, such as Lupton bey or Gessi. However, in 1881, the Mahdi rose up against the government in Sudan and the whole southern part of the country was disrupted by this event, including the Bahr el-Ghazal and the Uele, where the Azande chiefs once again found their autonomy.<sup>16</sup>

### 3 The ‘writers’

#### 3.1 The Arab and Swahili traders

In the Eastern Congo, the Arab and Swahili traders used to exchange letters and sign commercial contracts. When they were the authors of their letters, they used the expressions *bi-yadi-hi* or *kataba-hā*, and in fact, most of them were able to write these documents themselves.<sup>17</sup> Captain Stairs for instance mentions that ‘an important number of Arabs in Tabora are of pure race, coming from Muscat or other Arab localities. All of them can read and write and they speak intelligently’.<sup>18</sup> There is no reason to think that this does not apply to the Arab communities of the Eastern Congo, and in fact, Tobback confirms that ‘almost all the Arabs [in the Eastern Congo] can read and write’.<sup>19</sup> One should also note that the ‘Arab’ and Swahili traders who wrote and read these documents were of different origins. Stairs mentions that he carried a series of letters for two Baluchi chiefs established in Katanga, Kafindo and Uturutu, while other traders mentioned in the correspondence were originally from the Comoro islands, like Shanzi bin Jum’a.<sup>20</sup> Concerning the Azande area, the Arab traders who circulated in the area also made use of written documents, as did the Egyptian officers based in Aequatoria. In 1892, the Belgian officer

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<sup>16</sup> Thuriaux-Hennebert 1964, 158.

<sup>17</sup> Luffin 2007, 22.

<sup>18</sup> Stairs 1893, 102.

<sup>19</sup> Tobback 1894, 38.

<sup>20</sup> Stairs 1893, 159.

Jules Milz enrolled Sudanese soldiers who were formerly at the service of Emin Pasha. One of them had received several letters sent by the Mahdist, encouraging him to join their cause.<sup>21</sup>

### 3.2 Their secretaries

The Arab and Swahili traders often used the services of personal secretaries, who were both interpreters and translators. Shanzi bin Jum'a, who is mentioned in a Swahili letter stored in Tervuren, was described by some European sources as a secretary originating from the Comoro Islands, who also knew some French. A picture taken in 1892 shows him beside Rachid, and describes him as an interpreter.<sup>22</sup> Tobback's list also mentions another Comorian, Ali Mchangama or Mabilanga, as well as 'a man called Abdallah Baruki: 'Abdallah Baruki. 23 years old. Rachid's clerk (*écrivain, clerc*). Sent to Bomokandi (1891) to be punished'.<sup>23</sup> Many European sources mention the presence of a secretary accompanying Tippo Tip, apparently one of his relatives: Sālim bin Muḥammad. According to Parke, Sālim was also fluent in English, he had visited London and had formerly worked as an Arabic interpreter for the British Force at Suakin, Sudan.<sup>24</sup> Actually, it seems that this man was more than a mere scribe. In 1888, Tippo Tip sent him to meet Stanley in Yambuya in order to deliver him a message. Later, he entrusted him the task of taking care of a whole caravan at the Stanley Falls.<sup>25</sup> He was also somehow the 'living memory' of his master. In his book *Five years with the Congo Cannibals* (1891), Herbert Ward gives a long description of Tippo Tip's life. He mentions that it was his secretary, Salim bin Muhammad, who had given him the information.<sup>26</sup> In the North too, some of the Egyptian officers and Sudanese traders had their scribes. The Belgian sources say that the Sudanese soldiers enrolled by the EIC in 1893 were represented by four persons: two officers, and two clerks: Muhammad Efendi Ahmad (Muḥammad Efendi Aḥmad) and Sadig Efendi (Şādiq Efendi).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Lotar 1946, 159.

<sup>22</sup> Tobback 1894, 18.

<sup>23</sup> Tobback 1894, 19.

<sup>24</sup> Parke 1891, 490.

<sup>25</sup> Bontinck 1974, 136.

<sup>26</sup> Ward 1891, 173–190.

<sup>27</sup> Lotar 1946, 140.

### 3.3 Arab secretaries at the service of African chiefs

It seems that local chiefs sometimes asked the Arabs to write documents for them. Concerning the EIC, several Azande chiefs had secretaries in their service. Among the Uele documents that have been studied, some of them were sent by Arabs to Semio, as well as by Semio to Europeans and vice versa in the years up to 1893.<sup>28</sup> In 1891, Gustin says that Semio ‘cannot read nor write, but he has an Arab scribe or *katip* [sic]’.<sup>29</sup> Raymond Colrat de Montrozier, a member of the French mission sent to the Haut-Oubangui and the Bahr el-Ghazal in 1898, confirmed this many years later. He depicts his meetings with the Azande sultans, some of them then settled in the French colonial territories. Concerning his first meeting with Semio, he says that ‘the *faghi* [sic] or secretary of the sultan is the first one to appear. After many obsequious and insincere salutations, he sits down between your seat and the sultan’s seat’.<sup>30</sup> Moïse Landeroïn, a French military interpreter who knew Arabic, crossed the Azande kingdoms when he participated in the Marchand Expedition, which ended with the famous Fashoda crisis in 1898. He also states that Semio’s *feguih* ‘speaks Arabic rather well’.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, these sources give neither the name nor the origin of the *fagi*, however Colrat de Montrozier mentions that, in the royal court, there were ‘former ascaris of the Egyptian government, caporals and sergeants, who participated to Lupton and Gessi campaigns [...] and Arabs from the Darfur’.<sup>32</sup> At Rafay, the Arab traders seem to have come mainly from Waday.<sup>33</sup> In this case, it seems logical that this clerk came from the same area, Waday and Darfur.

According to Landeroïn, the Azande sultan Tambura was accompanied by his personal ‘*feguih*’ when he visited him in 1897:

The Sultan [Tambura], his *feguih* who speaks well Arabic and the whole court look like real bandits [...]. In the evening, the *feguih* came alone. He is clever, he comes from Ouaddaï [Waday] and he is far more intelligent than the rest of the Court.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See Abel 1954, 1385–1409; Luffin 2004b, 145–177.

<sup>29</sup> Salmon 1963, 20.

<sup>30</sup> Colrat de Montrozier 1902 (reprint 2004), 141.

<sup>31</sup> Landeroïn 1996, 63.

<sup>32</sup> Colrat de Montrozier 1902, 144.

<sup>33</sup> Colrat de Montrozier 1902, 204, 209.

<sup>34</sup> Landeroïn 1996, 74–75.

His name was Idris: he apparently originated from Waday, and he had lived in El Fasher (Darfur). He mentions that he traveled from there with books: the Quran, the Abu al-Ahsan book, *tafsirs*... he stayed in Kalaka (Waday) for two years, where he taught the Quran to the children and wrote amulets. Then, he had to flee because of the Dervishes heading to Kalaka. He went to Dango (Darfur), Dem Ziber (Bahr el-Ghazal), and then the Azande area. He eventually arrived in Tambura. Tambura told him that his *feguih* went to work for Ndoruma and he asked him to translate some of Zemio and Hajer's letters, then he asked him if he wanted to stay in his service. When Landeroin met him, he had been working for Tambura for eight years!<sup>35</sup> Landeroin mentions another *feguih*, called Feguih Ahmed, who had worked in the Shilluk and the Azande area, and who had been the friend of Idris: he was from the Kenana tribe, a subdivision of the Baggara around Tagale, Kordofan.<sup>36</sup> Another Azande sultan, Sasa, who spoke Arabic fluently<sup>37</sup>, also sent a 'courrier' to Van Kerckhoven, though the French term is ambiguous: it may be a letter, or a messenger bringing an oral message.<sup>38</sup> Some sources also mention the presence of Arab advisers, like the ones at Mopoi's court in 1909: 'Two or three "dervishes" play the role of advisers. They have some influence, since he follows their rite. Mopoi also has a chaplet [*chapelet* in French, prayer bead] and "dervish" amulets'.<sup>39</sup>

Another source mentions the identity of Mopoi's advisers: 'Hasan bin Muhammad, born in Aswan, and Mustafa Ben Bahekr [*sic*], from Berber (Sudan), expelled by the EIC authorities after that they served Mopoi for several years.'<sup>40</sup> However, there is no specific mention of the use of writing. Sasa too had Arab or Arabisés (Arabicized) advisers.<sup>41</sup> Whatever the case may be, all the letters found in the Azande area show a strong influence of Western Sudan/Chadian Arabic, which corroborates the observations about Tambura's *feguih*. Charles Swan, already quoted above, mentions the presence of Arab traders in the Garenganzwe between 1890 and 1893, as well as the use of Arabic writing at the royal court of Msiri. 'Some Arabs and Balukaluka who were composing armed bands looting the country had sent a letter in Arabic (I saw it but I couldn't read it) to Msidi [*sic*], saying that they were looting his land and that they intended to reach his capital to seize him and to bring him in their own country, as a trophy'.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Landeroin 1996, 279, 288.

<sup>36</sup> Landeroin 1996, 210.

<sup>37</sup> Salmon 1963, 27.

<sup>38</sup> Lotar 1946, 102.

<sup>39</sup> Salmon 1969, 17.

<sup>40</sup> Salmon 1969, 25.

<sup>41</sup> Salmon 1963, 41.

<sup>42</sup> Swan quoted by Verbeken 1956, 120.

This short reference shows that the king received letters in Arabic, which means that he needed somebody to read and maybe to translate them (Msiri knew Swahili, but the language used in the letter is not mentioned). Another European, Arnot, who visited the city at the same period, says in his book entitled *Bihe and Garenganze*: ‘We found the chief sitting under the verandah of the queen’s large house, and on his right sat two Arabs, busy at work, writing their strange hieroglyphics.’<sup>43</sup>

This short phrase can be seen as a reference to Arab secretaries. Of course, the text does not clearly mention that they were writing for the King. However, the fact that they stay in the queen’s house while writing their letters implies that these documents were somehow official letters. Other chiefs and kings outside of the EIC, at the same period, were renting the services of Arabic- and Swahili-speaking secretaries. Several sources mention that Mtesa, the king of Buganda, was fluent in Swahili, and that he was able to read and write in Arabic. However, he also had two personal scribes: Masudi, a man from the Swahili Coast who arrived in Buganda around 1870, and Idi, who came from the Comoro islands.<sup>44</sup> Edvard Gleeup, Per Hassing and Norman Bennett mention that Rubeya ben Khalfan al-Harithi (Rub’ayya bin Khalfān al-Ḥārithi) – a Zanzibari trader with Omani roots, according to his name – was the secretary of the Nyamwezi chief Mpanda Shalo, the successor of Mirambo.<sup>45</sup> Actually, it seems that the chief asked Rubeya to manage his business correspondence with coastal traders as well as with the Germans.<sup>46</sup>

### 3.4 The local Arab traders at the service of the Europeans

Many sources describe how European explorers and missionaries used official letters written by influential Arabs as a pass in order to be introduced into a city or even to get the authorization to cross a territory. Captain Stairs says that, before he left Zanzibar in 1891 with a caravan heading to Katanga, he met the Sultan of Zanzibar, Sayyid ‘Alī: ‘I explained to his Highness the purpose of my journey. Then I asked him to help me recruiting men and to give me letters demanding the people of Karema, Rua, Itawa and Katanga in order to assist me.’<sup>47</sup> Later on, he describes how he handed over these letters, for instance when he arrived in Tabora: ‘This

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<sup>43</sup> Arnot 1893, 59.

<sup>44</sup> Oded 1974, 86.

<sup>45</sup> Bontinck 1974, 182.

<sup>46</sup> Pesek 2006, 401.

<sup>47</sup> Stairs 1893, 14.

morning I have sent my letters to the German chief of Tabora, to the governor (Luali) and to eight or nine of the main Arab chiefs of the place.<sup>48</sup>

### 3.5 The ‘foreign’ secretaries at the service of the Colonial officers

The administration of the EIC was aware of the need for Arabic speakers in the Uele, due to the information given by the former explorers of this area bordering Sudan. So, the European administrators were accompanied by Arab secretaries recruited especially for their linguistic skills. At least five of them are known: Jacob Soliman, Ezekiel Matook, Joseph Inver, Doctor Sabbagh and Sélim Talamas. They are supposed to have translated the (oral) speeches and messages of the Arabs as well as of the Azande sultans and their messengers. We know that they had to give a written translation of the documents sent to – or intercepted by – EIC representatives. They also had to prepare the Arabic version of local contracts and treaties. However, their task often went beyond interpretation, Jacob Soliman for instance was appointed Resident at Ganda. What do we know about them?

Jacob Soliman was born in Cairo in 1866. At first, he was an interpreter of the Egyptian army and was based in Suakin (Sudan), with the grade of sub-lieutenant. Then, he was in charge of teaching Arabic to British officers in Cairo. In 1889, he started to work for the EIC. He arrived in Basoko and accompanied the Roget-Milz Expedition in 1890. In July 1893, he translated a contract into Arabic, drawn up between the EIC and some former Egyptian officers which confirmed their enrollment into the EIC. However, according to Delanghe, his translation seems to have been poor, and to the advantage of the Egyptians, stipulating clauses that were not in the original, such as the fact that the EIC had to give them arms and ammunition.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, in November 1893, he was appointed ‘Résident’ at Ganda. He accompanied Van Kerchoven and Milz to the Nile, and stayed at Dufilé in December 1893. He was killed close to Ganda during a battle against the Emir Arabi (Amīr ‘Arabī).<sup>50</sup>

Ezekiel Matook was born in Bagdad in 1857. He had British nationality. He had been introduced by the Consul of Belgium in Alexandria and was recruited as ‘*commis interprète*’ (interpreter) of the EIC on January 6, 1894. He arrived in Boma on February 1 and was sent to Ubangi-Bomu, where he arrived in May 1894. In November, he worked for the leader of the expedition to the Haut-Uele. In April 1895, the

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<sup>48</sup> Stairs 1893, 95.

<sup>49</sup> Lotar 1946, 154.

<sup>50</sup> Coosemans 1948, 857.

Belgian officer Georges Bricusse met him in Ibembo. He says he had been sentenced to three years in prison for ‘bad things’. He finally went back to Boma in July 1895, and resigned in August 2 before heading to Antwerp.<sup>51</sup> Bricusse thought he was an Egyptian, probably because he had been recruited in Alexandria.

Joseph Inver was born in Istanbul in 1872. He was an Arabic interpreter. He took part in the expeditions of Hanolet, Stroobant and Van Calster and reached Mbelle in April 1894. After a short stay in Europe in 1895, he joined the EIC again, and was supposed to accompany Dhanis from the Stanley Falls to the Nile, but he was killed in Mongwa in February 1897.<sup>52</sup> Sélim Talamas, born in Alexandria in 1865, arrived in the Congo in the summer of 1894 as an official Arabic interpreter for the EIC. He served in Semio, Uele, and died in Bomu in October 1896. Lotar mentions him, but none of his translations has yet been found in the archives.<sup>53</sup> A last Arabic translator and interpreter was Doctor Sabbagh. We know nothing about his country of origin, but at the end of the 1860s, he was at the service of the EIC, where he translated Azande letters for Captain De Bauw in 1897.<sup>54</sup>

When translators were not available on the spot, the European officers of the EIC sent the Arabic documents they received or intercepted to the European consulates established in Zanzibar, in order to have them translated.<sup>55</sup> The other colonial powers also used to hire the services of translators and interpreters. In the case of France, these interpreters were sometimes Frenchmen who had worked in Arabic speaking countries. This was the case of Moïse Landeroin (1867–1962), who had worked as an *officier interprète* (interpreter officer) in Tunis (1900), Niger (1900–1905), Niger and Chad (1906–1922). His own report of the Marchand Expedition (1896–99) has been published in French. In his diary, he explains how he translates letters, but also how he writes them – he mentions a letter of six pages sent to Semio! – and also that he needs the ‘Kazimviski’ [sic] – he means the A. Kazimirski’s Arabic-French dictionary published in 1860 and still useful today.<sup>56</sup>

### 3.6 The local skills

In the Eastern Congo, the Belgian officer Dhanis had a secretary called Fundi Lubangi, as he mentions in his personal notes. The term *fundi* has several meanings

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<sup>51</sup> Salmon 1966, 64 n. 1

<sup>52</sup> Coosemans 1948, I, 533.

<sup>53</sup> Lotar 1940, 157.

<sup>54</sup> Luffin 2004b, 157.

<sup>55</sup> Maréchal 1992, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Landerouin 1996, 88.

in Swahili, like ‘master of a craft, skilled worker, artist’ but here it clearly refers to his ability to write. Given his name, this man was probably a local secretary, but we cannot exclude that he was a Coastal Swahili or an Arab, since many Omani traders had an ‘African’ nickname. As we have seen before, several Western sources mention the good – or even very good – knowledge of Arabic among some Azande chiefs, like Semio or Rafay. In the case of Rafay, it even seems that all the notables, the soldiers and most of the men of his city were able to speak Arabic. However, were they able to read and to write Arabic? Lotar clearly says that Rafay himself was illiterate, but we can suppose that some had a certain knowledge of Arabic, though this is merely a hypothesis.

To begin with, many of them made use of religious documents written in Arabic: we have already mentioned amulets. We also know that copies of the Quran circulated in the area. According to Graziani, Sasa ‘bears a Quran in his hands’. Charles de la Kéthulle describes an Abanda chief called Bandassi: ‘he speaks Arabic correctly and he follows the Quran’s precepts.’<sup>57</sup> He is even a fanatic. His clothes are decorated with Quranic verses. At critical moments, he puts a cordon around his forehead with small leather booklets containing Quranic verses. The grip of his Remington and the hilt of his sword are also decorated with small copies of the Quran’.<sup>58</sup> Chaltin describes Mopoi in the same way in 1896: ‘He wears an Arab dress and a belt with bags containing passages of the Quran’.<sup>59</sup> However, the use of amulets or owning a copy of the Quran does not mean that their possessor had the ability to read them, and their role may have been merely symbolic. This hypothesis is reinforced by the description of Rafay amulets in de la Kéthulle’s report: ‘the sultan, the chiefs and the notables wear small leather booklets, hermetically closed, sometimes containing Quranic verses, though it mostly consists of blank paper free of any inscription’.<sup>60</sup>

However, some letters among the set of Azande documents differ from the rest: the handwriting is very awkward and one of them is even practically unreadable. The content is in pure colloquial Arabic, different from the Middle Arabic used in the other documents. One of the letters had been deciphered by the EIC translator, Doctor Sabbagh, who declared in his comment that it took him a long time to decipher these ‘hieroglyphic characters’.<sup>61</sup> Though we cannot exclude that they have been written by a bad secretary, we can reasonably assume that the author was an

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<sup>57</sup> Salmon 1963, 53.

<sup>58</sup> Kéthulle 1895, 425.

<sup>59</sup> Lotar 1940, 251.

<sup>60</sup> Kéthulle 1895, 417.

<sup>61</sup> Luffin 2004b, 157.



Arabic-speaking Azande, maybe the sultan Sasa himself. Concerning Katanga, we have already mentioned the presence of the Arabs in Msiri's Court and their role as scribes. One observation made by the Captain Stairs, again, may imply that Msiri himself was able to write. Stairs says that before his arrival in Msiri's capital, a messenger brought him three letters: 'They bring me a letter sent by Msiri, written in English by M. D. Crawford, a missionary and Mister Arnot's colleague, another, in Swahili, emanating from Msiri himself ('émanant de Msiri lui-même') and a personal message from M. Crawford.'<sup>62</sup> Outside of the Congo, the most interesting case is that of Mtesa and his notables. Here is what Stanley says about Mtesa's court, where he stayed in 1875: 'Nearly all the principal attendants at the court can write the Arabic letters. The Emperor and many of the chiefs both read and write that character with facility, and frequently employ it to send messages to another, or to strangers at a distance.'<sup>63</sup>

### 3.7 The occasional scribes

I already mentioned the Swahili treaties signed between local chiefs and Emile Storms, the representative of the *Association Internationale Africaine* (AIA) in the Marungu starting in 1883. Storms wrote both a book and an article in the *Mouvement géographique*, where he gives more information about the context surrounding the signing of the treaties, and it appears that the five chiefs who signed the treaties knew neither Arabic writing nor the Swahili language, since an interpreter was used to translate their conversations with Storms. This means that the production of 'ajamī documents, in this area and in this period, was apparently related to the presence of Swahili soldiers from Zanzibar among Storms's African soldiers.<sup>64</sup> Another document from Uele may bring to light the occasional use of the skills of other actors. Among the Uele documents that de Bauw brought back to Belgium, there is the copy of a letter sent to Semio. This letter is written in Swahili, or rather in a mixed language, a kind of Swahili-Arabic. The use of Swahili in this area and at this period is rather strange: the European sources dealing with the Azande sultanates never mention the use of Swahili among the Azande sultans or their men.<sup>65</sup> My hypothesis is that for some unknown reason De Bauw had no interpreter at hand at the time, so he asked one of his Zanzibari soldiers to write a letter in Arabic.

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<sup>62</sup> Stairs 1893, 183.

<sup>63</sup> Stanley 1899, 322.

<sup>64</sup> Luffin 2007a, 188.

<sup>65</sup> Luffin 2004b, 166.

This occasional scribe probably had a limited knowledge of Arabic, so he completed the ‘gaps’ with Swahili words. A final case of occasional translators is that of the Egyptian traders mentioned above, who had spent two weeks translating Mahdist archives for Chaltin, when he seized the city of Redjaf in 1897.

### 3.8 Clergymen and the Quranic schools

There are only a very few mentions of religious men in colonial testimonies. Concerning the East, Georges Bricusse met several Arab prisoners coming from the Eastern Congo (Kabambare, etc.) sent to Bumba, in 1894. He mentions the presence of ‘a priest’ among them: ‘Beau type également le grand prêtre – traits fins, œil intelligent, barbe grise.’<sup>66</sup> Bricusse mentions neither his name nor his origin, but we may assume that the man was an imam or a *faqih*. The same could be said of a man described in a letter in 1891 by Hinde, in Riba Riba, to Tobback: ‘I have seen the priest N’Djadi, he looks very kind and he goes to the [Stanley] Falls, he is the one who will give you your boat as well as this letter.’<sup>67</sup>

Tobback himself wrote a list of the influential Arabs in the Eastern Congo in 1891. The list was published in 1893 in the *Congo illustré*, and describes Djadi-ben-Amisi as ‘Djadi-ben-Amici. His nickname: Kussu. A white Arab. 45 years old. He lives in the Falls. Very rich. Not cruel. A Muslim priest. He operates in the Lomami, the Lopori and the Uele. He stammers. He has 300 rifles.’<sup>68</sup> These clergymen had established Quranic schools in the area. An oral tradition quoted by Marechal says that Kalenda Njike, one of Ngongo Lutete’s sons, had studied at the Arab school of Kasongo.<sup>69</sup> In the *Congo illustré*, a detailed description of the Arabs in the Eastern Congo says that ‘the many children of the Arabs are raised with care. The scribe, a kind of secretary, is a part of the ‘home’ for any chief or notable, he or the sheikh (a Muslim priest) give them their first education, notions of reading and writing (almost all the Arabs can read and write). When the time came, the father found the occasion to send his best sons to the schools in Tabora, the [Swahili] Coast or Zanzibar. It seems that before the destruction of Nyangwe, there was a school there.’<sup>70</sup> A picture taken in Kasongo in 1904 shows a Quranic school<sup>71</sup>. Many details are interesting, like the use of the wooden tablets, the very young age of the pupils, and

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<sup>66</sup> Salmon 1966, 46.

<sup>67</sup> MRAC Archives, RG 617.

<sup>68</sup> Tobback 1894, 19.

<sup>69</sup> Maréchal 1992, 315.

<sup>70</sup> Tobback 1894, 36.

<sup>71</sup> Maréchal 1992, 277.

the fact that, in this case, both the children and their master all seem to be indigenous, not Omanis.

Arthur Detry was a judge who worked in the Congo between 1907 and 1918. He wrote a book about the Muslim community of Stanleyville, where he arrived in 1909, which is one year after the end of the EIC. Of course, what he describes about the use of Arabic at that time was the result of the previous situation, during the EIC period. Here is his description of the Kisangani's Quranic school: 'In Kisangani, the 'village arabisé' of Stanleyville, lives a great *mwaliimu*. This *mwaliimu* is the initiator, the one who's in charge of teaching the children how to write, as well as the Quranic precepts and the ancestors' customs. He is accompanied by a man almost as learned as he is [...]. The two men are assisted by 18 teachers who depend on them and follow their instructions [...]. The customs are handwritten. They write them in the Swahili language with the Arabic alphabet. The *mwaliimu* reads them and exposes them to the children. They are conceived as precepts, maxims and parables.'<sup>72</sup> He also mentions that the *mwaliimu* writes amulets, with a calam and red mud as ink, and that he possesses books written in Swahili. He says for instance that

all the written customs, specific to the Banguana, are called Uaguana and are divided in four books: the *Morahabahti*, the *Shamtilimanfi*, the *Kitabutchanusai* and the *Kazel Kule*. We can say that it is almost impossible for the European to get a copy of these documents. The only way to know them would be to gain the total trust of an instructed chief. This is not an easy task [...]. These customs are hand-written. They write them in the Swahili language with the help of the Arabic letters. The *Mwaliimu* read them and expose them to the children.<sup>73</sup>

In another passage, he mentions other books that he calls *kanuni*; saying that they are of a juridical nature. 'We mention here several texts possessed by our Arabisés and which are copies of successive Kanuni, imposed by the conquerors during a series of forays.'<sup>74</sup> Another useful piece of information in Detry's book concerns the extent of writing in Stanleyville around 1910: 'We can affirm that all the Blacks who follow the [*mwaliimu*'s] teaching and have adopted Islam are able to write and read Swahili, often very purely'.<sup>75</sup> An interesting but obscure passage of de la Kéthulle's report about Islamic influence at Rafay possibly mentions clergymen mastering the Arabic writing: 'It is possible that the powerful sect of the Senoussis has extended

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<sup>72</sup> Detry 1912, 7.

<sup>73</sup> Detry 1912 7.

<sup>74</sup> Detry 1912, 173.

<sup>75</sup> Detry 1912, 9.

its propaganda as far as among the Azande, the Abanda and the Kreich. What is certain is that some initiated men (*initiés*) coming from Waday, Darfur and Kordofan live by the sultans. Some of these initiated men know how to read and write Arabic and they have some instruction.<sup>76</sup> As I mentioned before, the sources generally call the scribe *kātib*, but also *fagīh*, the colloquial pronunciation of *faqīh*, which originally had a religious meaning. We can imagine that these men were initially clergymen, or clergymen and scribes at the same time, and that they were probably the makers of the sultan's amulets described by the Europeans. Finally, the Museum of Tervuren also contains two *lawḥa*, written on both sides, brought back to Belgium by Jean Uyttenhove (1873–1931), a lieutenant of the *Force Publique* who worked in the Lado area until 1906. The texts on the *lawḥa* are a list of the 99 names of God and a prayer, and the writing is related to North African writings, as shown by the use of the *qāf* with a dot under the graph, etc. This tends to indicate the presence of a Quranic school in the area.

## 4 Conclusion

The preserved Swahili and Arabic documents as well as the external sources mentioning them show that literacy was not something unusual in some parts of the Congo in the 1890s. The same sources also show that the Arabs and the Swahilis coming from the Eastern Coast were not the only people who could speak, read and write Arabic: people originating from the Comoro Islands or Baluchistan, for instance, were also literate, as well as some indigenous people. Some of the scribes had had long careers, sometimes starting outside of the Congo, and they were often at the service of more than one person. Their role was also multiple: they both read and wrote the correspondence of their chiefs, but some of them also made amulets, for instance.

On the arrival of the Europeans, knowledge of Arabic had started to circulate, though limitedly, in the local population: in the Uele basin, some Azande chiefs were able to speak, and even read and write Arabic, while in the East, one of Ngongo Lutete's sons had been sent to the local Quranic school. We know very few things about these Quranic schools, but we learn from the sources that they were already established in the 1890s, and probably earlier. Another point is the impact of the European presence in the area. When the representatives of the EIC were well established in the Congo, they started to challenge Arabic literacy, by promoting

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<sup>76</sup> Kéthulle 1895, 407.

the use of Swahili in Latin script, as the British and the Germans did in East Africa. Even before the development of missionary schools, the process was under way: Jérôme Becker, a Belgian officer who participated in the first explorations of the Congo for the AIA, explains in his book that he taught the Arab trader Sefu bin Rashid how to write Swahili in Latin characters, in the early 1880s. He also says that at the same period, the sons of the Buganda chiefs came to meet the European explorers for the same purpose.<sup>77</sup> However, just before this period, the Europeans somehow contributed to the flow of Arabic literacy in the Congo, though only for a very short time, since they answered the letters they received in Arabic and Swahili in the same languages, and with the same Arabic alphabet. Some of them like de la Kéthulle even started to learn Arabic, while others like G. F. Wtterwulghé in 1904 and G. Moltedo in 1905 wrote some phrasebooks containing words and sentences in Arabic in order to facilitate the communication between the EIC officers and the local population.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, the EIC enrolled translators from the Middle East in order to communicate orally and literally with local chiefs and traders, bringing new actors into this process. This, in addition to the numerous references to Arabic literacy in Western sources dealing with the Congo, also shows that the first Europeans who stayed in the Congo – travelers, EIC officers, etc. – did not try to hide the phenomenon, although history seems to have forgotten their testimonies.

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<sup>77</sup> Becker 1887, II, 49, 199.

<sup>78</sup> Luffin 2004, 373–398.

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## Section 4: **Notes**





Mohamadou Halirou

# Moodibbo Bello Aamadu Mohammadu and the *Daada Maaje*, a Handbook in an Indigenous Fulfulde Script

**Abstract:** This note introduces the biography and the activities of Moodibbo Bello Aamadu, a Muslim scholar based in northern Cameroon who has invented an original alphabet for the writing of Fulfulde. Although Moodibbo Bello's Fulfulde alphabet has not been in use beyond a restricted circle of his students, this attempt constitutes an important addition to our knowledge of indigenous African writing systems. The apparently curious record of Fulfulde, a language for which at least three different alphabets (besides '*ajamī*') have been already documented in the literature, can be explained by the historical role of the Fulfulde-speaking Muslim scholars as vehicles of literacy across the western, central and eastern Sudan.

## 1 Introduction

Over the last few years, I have been involved in a survey of '*ajamī*' manuscripts in the Lamidate of Maroua (in the Extrême Nord region of Cameroon). During this project, I have also collected the biographies of several Muslim scholars (in Fulfulde, *moodibbo*, pl. *moodiɓɓe*) of the region. In general, the *moodiɓɓe* produce two distinct kinds of manuscripts: those in Arabic and those in '*ajamī*'. As highlighted by Idrissa Yansambou,<sup>1</sup> Arabic manuscripts are either original texts composed by local scholars in the different disciplines or copies of classical works intended for individual or collective use in educational circles. The quality of the Arabic used in these various texts depends on the educational level of the author of the manuscript. Some texts are difficult to access even for specialists, if the latter are not familiar with the mother tongue of the author of the manuscript

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1 Yansambou 2003.

consulted, as well as with Arabic. This is due to the linguistic interference of the author's own language, which sometimes produces complex phrasal forms in Arabic. As for the *'ajamī* manuscripts, they are written in African languages using the Arabic alphabet with some creative adaptation used to render the phonemes that are not represented by any existing Arabic letter. Apart from a few isolated attempts, this was by far the most widely used system to transcribe African languages before the irruption of the Latin alphabet during colonial times. As already stressed by Yansambou, both the above categories of manuscript show the level of mastery of literacy by African scholars and disprove the claim that writing was brought to Africa by the European colonialists.<sup>2</sup>

Notwithstanding the wide use of Arabic in pre-colonial West Africa, there are cases in which original scripts (whether alphabetical or otherwise) have been devised locally for the writing of selected languages. In 1969, the number of indigenous African scripts was assessed by David Dalby at fourteen.<sup>3</sup> The best studied are the cases of the N'ko writing for Mande (Mali, Guinea),<sup>4</sup> of the Vai script in Liberia,<sup>5</sup> of the Kikakui script used for Mende (Sierra Leone)<sup>6</sup> and of the Bamun script in Cameroon.<sup>7</sup> Two Fulfulde scripts devised by individual scholars in Mali and never popularized beyond their private circles were also identified in 1969 by David Dalby.<sup>8</sup> This brief note adds to the literature on African (and in particular, Fulfulde) indigenous scripts by introducing the biography and the works of a Muslim scholar of northern Cameroon who has devised and used his own original system for the writing of Fulfulde. Interestingly, with the addition of the alphabet devised by Moodibbo Bello Aamadu Mohammadu here described to those of Oumar Dembélé and Adama Ba already identified by Dalby, Fulfulde holds the curious record of featuring three distinct alphabets. This is not so surprising, however, if one considers (1) the geographical extent of the areas in which Fulani communities live and (2) the degree of their interaction with (and the influence of) the written culture of Arabic.

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<sup>2</sup> Yansambou 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Dalby 1969, 161–181. The author wishes to thank Andrea Brigaglia for drawing his attention to Dalby's article.

<sup>4</sup> Oyler 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Dalby 1967.

<sup>6</sup> Tuchscherer 1995, 169–188.

<sup>7</sup> Dugast/Jeffreys 1950.

<sup>8</sup> Dalby 1969, 168–174.

## 2 Moodibbo Bello Aamadu Mohammodu and the *Daada Maaje*

Moodibbo Bello Aamadu Mohammodu was born in April 1926 into a family of Fulani herdsmen and scholars, then living in present-day Sudan.<sup>9</sup> The east-west movement of Fulani families between the Lake Chad region and the eastern Sudan is a known historical phenomenon. The Fulani, in fact, do not occupy a continuous territory, but live in scattered, often nomadic communities throughout the Sahel zone, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Lake Chad and the eastern Sudan. This region is particularly suitable for cattle herding, which is still the favorite activity of many Fulani communities.

A conversation between the author of the present note and Moodibbo Bello, as well as a short autobiographical note found in the *moodibbo*'s personal archive,<sup>10</sup> confirmed that Mohammodu, grandfather of Bello, had left the region of Adamawa to move to the Sudan for pastoral as well as for commercial reasons. His son Aamadu, who succeeded him as the head of a large herd in Sudan, wanted his children to learn both Arabic and Fulfulde, in order to limit the linguistic influence of the communities amongst which they had settled. It is for this reason that, instead of relying on local teachers for the education of his sons, he invited a *moodibbo* from northern Cameroon to move to Sudan and live with his family, so that he could teach his children the Quran and the writing of Arabic and Fulfulde '*ajamī*'. This teacher, known as Mousbad, was to give a new direction to the educational and professional life of Aamadu's sons, especially to the young Bello, whom he would inspire to cultivate a profound love for his mother tongue.

Before turning twelve, Bello Aamadu had learnt how to read and write in Arabic. Motivated by curiosity, he frequently visited the house of his teacher Moodibbo Mousbad and consulted any documents he could find in the latter's small private library. Moodibbo Mousbad was a scholar of repute, who had been educated in northern Nigeria before establishing several Quranic schools in Adamawa. As a teenager, Bello's peers had already started to make fun of his habit of constantly drawing or scribbling signs on the sand floor, while listening to people talking or

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<sup>9</sup> As already emphasized by Hamadou Adama, the Fulani should not be considered as a 'racial' group, but as an ethnic/cultural category, that is to say, a flexible identity that is characterized mainly by certain cultural traits and a common language, and also by a specific code of conduct: the Pulaaku (Amadou/Adama 1998, 71–91).

<sup>10</sup> Moodibbo Bello Aamadu Mohammodu, private archive.

doing other activities. His teacher Mousbad, instead of reprimanding him, encouraged him.

Bello, all your friends think you're crazy. They say you're a dreamer because you don't stop scribbling things on the floor. If you want to express your talent of drawing, find yourself a better support such as paper and draw whatever you want.<sup>11</sup>

With those words, Moodibbo Mousbad helped to set the career of Bello Aamadu Mohammadu as a Fulani Muslim scholar in motion, with the “mission” of promoting a Fulfulde script.

It was only later—Bello says—that my childhood friends and my elders realized that I was not spending my time drawing, but that when I was listening to people speaking, I was trying to fit their words to new characters that were coming to my mind spontaneously.<sup>12</sup>

For Bello, the alphabetic characters he had started to experiment with in his childhood were simply a divine gift. It is for this reason that later in his life he would dedicate himself tirelessly to the refinement and promotion of this script, even in the face of the indifference with which his experiment was received by the larger community of Fulani scholars. His interest had been sparked a few years earlier, when Moodibbo Mousbad had told him that Fulfulde could only be written with the Arabic alphabet. Bello had noticed, however, that certain Fulfulde letters were missing from the Arabic alphabet and he had started to question the rationale of relying purely on the Arabic alphabet. Later, he found books in Moodibbo Mousbad's collection that mentioned Egyptian civilization and the influence of hieroglyphics in the development of the written word, and was inspired to invent a system for Fulfulde. The system invented by Moodibbo Bello consists of twenty-eight characters as represented in Fig. 3 below. Although it is possible that in designing the shapes, Bello was somehow inspired by the Egyptian hieroglyphics he had seen in his teacher's books, the system he devised is in fact a consonantal system like the one used in the writing of Arabic, which most probably constituted Bello's primary model.

It was only at the age of twenty-five, after having spent more than ten years privately refining and practicing his system, that Bello first told Moodibbo Mousbad how he was able to write every possible Fulfulde word with a script other than Ar-

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<sup>11</sup> Author's interview with Moodibbo Bello Aamadu, 22/03/2005.

<sup>12</sup> Author's interview with Moodibbo Bello Aamadu, 22/03/2005.

abic. Surprised, the teacher said: ‘I don’t think it’s possible to write Fulfulde without using the Arabic letters I have taught you!’<sup>13</sup> ‘Indeed it is possible, my master’ —Bello replied— ‘my pseudo-drawings, in fact, are nothing but letters I have invented and by using them, all the Fulfulde letters can be written down consistently’.<sup>14</sup>

After looking at the writings on his pupil’s notebook, Moodibbo Mousbad realized that there was very little he could say as he knew nothing about this system. The notebook was then circulated among the Fulani Muslim scholars of the region, but none of them appreciated it. For some, it was inappropriate to use anything other than the letters of the Arabic alphabet while for others, the characters in the notebook were too complex to learn and would have constituted a waste of time. Thus, Bello had to put his innovation temporarily to one side. After the completion of his studies, the professional debut of Moodibbo Bello as a Muslim scholar in Sudan was not an easy one. While he persisted in promoting his Fulfulde writing system, most fellow Fulani scholars replied that they considered it irrelevant, while many of the Arab scholars saw it as a potential threat to the status of Arabic in the country. To many, the idea that the invention came from a very young scholar was an additional obstacle to their taking it seriously. To Moodibbo Bello, however, his Fulfulde script was not his invention, but a gift from God. This is the reason why he kept writing pamphlets and brochures attempting to explain the new system and defending its cause. His endeavor is illustrated in some of the figures below.<sup>15</sup>

The logo in Fig.1 has an explanation. The circle represents Africa’s sunshine, symbolizing the author’s hope for a better future for the continent and for the success of his writing system. In the author’s own words:

They [i.e. the Europeans] came to Africa [i.e. to Egypt] to learn, to study. They returned home, used and showcased the achievements of Africa and now they refuse to admit that Africa has a history. Whether they like it or not, within my lifetime or after it, my writings will shine forth by the will of the Almighty!<sup>16</sup>

Acknowledging that his writings had been rejected in Sudan and declaring that he wanted to get to know his family back in North Cameroon (to be precise, in Maroua), Moodibbo Bello left his homeland Sudan in 1972. This was, in fact, the first long distance journey he undertook in his life. Originally, his intention had been to

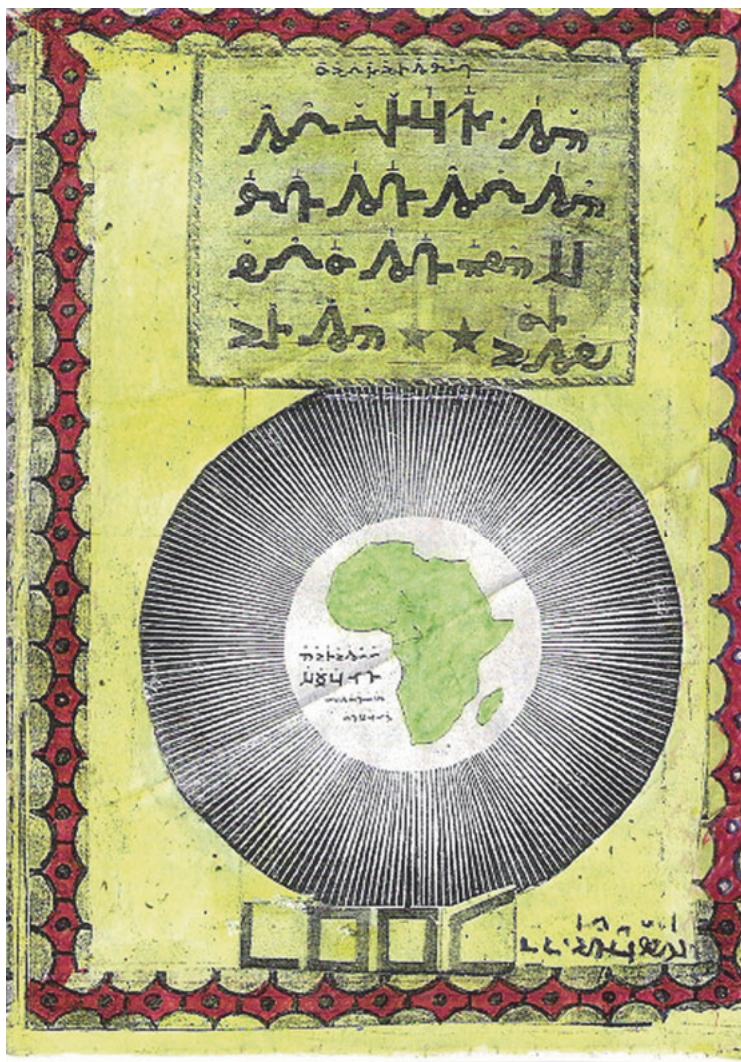
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<sup>13</sup> Author’s interview with Moodibbo Bello Aamadu, 22/03/2005.

<sup>14</sup> Author’s interview with Moodibbo Bello Aamadu, 22/03/2005.

<sup>15</sup> All the figures reproduced in this article were photographed by the author in Moodibbo Bello Aamadu Mohammadu’s personal archive.

<sup>16</sup> Author’s interview with Moodibbo Bello Aamadu Mohammadu, 22/03/2005.



**Fig. 1:** The cover page of a pamphlet written by Moodibbo Bello Aamadu Mohammadu to defend his invention.

spend a short time in Cameroon before returning to Sudan. Once arrived in Maroua, however, he decided to settle there permanently. The two main reasons for staying in Maroua, were the warm welcome he received from his maternal

family, and because he saw northern Cameroon, with its mainly Fulfulde-speaking society, as the ideal environment to promote his invention and showcase his writings. His settling in the town and his being accepted by the town's elders were facilitated by his knowledge of religion and, very soon, Bello started to preach in the local mosques, earning the title of *moodibbo*. In Maroua, Moodibbo Bello was able to build strong links with the administrative authorities and the traditional rulers, a fact which was clearly indicated when the Lamido (traditional ruler) of Maroua personally intervened to solicit the assistance of President Ahmadou Ahidjo in order to ensure that Moodibbo Bello would be granted permission to reside permanently in Maroua.

During his lifetime, Moodibbo Bello has written and translated many works. From his youth in Sudan, when he first developed his original Fulfulde script, to his later years in Cameroon, he constantly collected Arabic books and translated them into his Fulfulde script. According to Moodibbo Bello, his encounter with the famous French linguist and anthropologist Henry Tournoux, a well-known specialist of the languages of northern Cameroon, was another decisive moment which further encouraged him to pursue his writing. Observing a European who dedicated his life to traveling through the villages of northern Cameroon to record the lexicon and grammar of local languages, reinforced his conviction that his own effort to preserve the richness of Fulfulde was indeed a worthwhile pursuit.<sup>17</sup>

Although he never opened a school or educational organization specifically devoted to the teaching of his Fulfulde script, a few interested people have learned it directly from him in the vestibule of his house, creating a small network of users. In order to facilitate the teaching of his script, Moodibbo Bello has produced several works. The figures and tables below are all reproduced or adapted from one of them, called *Daada Maaje* (literally, 'mother of them [books]'), which is the elementary text with an extensive handbook that he normally uses as an aid to teach beginners.

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17 Author's interview with Moodibbo Bello Aamadu Mohamadu, 22/03/2005.



**Fig. 2:** The front cover of *Daada Maaje*.

**Tab. 1:** The correspondence between Moodibbo Bello's alphabetical system and the Fulfulde letters in Latin script (in square brackets, the phonological correspondence).

= ' (glot- tal stop)	= y	= h	= m	= d	= k	= z
= mb [mb]	= l	= b	= f	= j [dʒ]	= r	= ng [ŋg]
= ny [n]	= ŋ	= c [ʃ]	= nd	= nj [ɲ]	= w	= n
= b	= g	= t	= y	= d	= p	= s





Fig. 3: Sample syllabary from Moodibbo Bello's *Daada Maaje*.

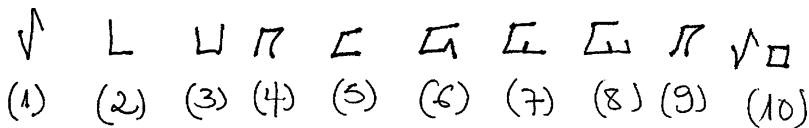


Fig. 4: The numbers in the decimal system used in Moodibbo Bello's *Daada Maaje*.

### 3 Conclusion

The *Daada Maaje* is a curious handbook written as an aid to teach the Fulfulde language according to the alphabetical script invented by Moodibbo Bello Aamadu Mohammadu, a Fulani scholar of Sudanese origin who is in his early eighties and who lives in Maroua (northern Cameroon). This handbook reflects the genius of this local scholar and his tireless dedication to and passion for promoting what he has always felt as his life's "mission". Moodibbo Bello Aamadu Mohammadu, however, also has many other short writings to his credit, some of which are in the possession of the present author, in the form of copies. All of his writings are in the original script briefly presented in this note. In terms of their

content, many of them reflect his interest in and his love for traditional Fulani culture, as they are devoted to topics such as local pharmacopeia, traditional folktales etc. Although the experiments of Moodibbo Bello with his Fulfulde alphabet are well known in Maroua, it is difficult to assess the number of people who have actually learnt to read and write in this script. In the opinion of the present author, we can say that the number of users of the *Daada Maaɓe* is probably very small. In fact, most Cameroonian Fulani scholars—just like their counterparts in Sudan who rejected Moodibbo Bello's early experiments—continue to frown upon any attempt to use any script other than Arabic for the writing of Fulfulde. This notwithstanding, the determination of this resourceful Muslim scholar to contribute to the culture of writing in Fulfulde bears witness to his personal inventiveness and to his tireless devotion to the promotion and preservation of the heritage of an African language.

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# Mahmoud Mohamed Dédéou and Shamil Jeppie

## Elements of a ‘Timbuktu Manual of Style’

**Abstract:** This is a translation of a short text that clarifies the role of additional markings in manuscripts from Timbuktu. It is the work of an experienced reader and author of manuscripts in Timbuktu, Mahmoud Mohamed Dédéou, known as Cheikh Hamou. It is therefore a very useful introduction to an often overlooked practice in the art of scholarship in that part of the world.

### 1 *Addendum on the techniques of the copyists:* introduction to the text

The single-page text described here was written by Mahmoud Mohamed Dédéou, known as Cheikh Hamou (b.1955). It originates from a lecture that he gave in Cape Town in 2008. He always speaks from well prepared notes, often, it appears, fully written up. Thus, this text is typical of his thorough preparation for a lecture, which he has always been happy to pre-circulate on request or distribute afterwards. Cheikh Hamou is a senior scholar from Timbuktu who was educated in the local traditional schools of the town and has run early morning classes for children at his home for many years. He also works as an inspector in the state school system with the responsibility for supervising Arabic language education. He was involved in collecting manuscripts for the Ahmad Baba Centre (officially known as the *Institut des Hautes Etudes et de Recherches Islamiques Ahmed-Baba*, IHERI-AB) when it was developing its collections. The first and only list of his written work is by the late John O. Hunwick in *Arabic Literature of Africa vol. IV* which counts 19 works.<sup>1</sup> However, the number of Cheikh Hamou’s works has increased since then. In a recent listing he provided, he gave the titles of 35 works (which includes, what we would call essays, as well as larger manuscript works classifiable as books). Indeed, his largest and probably most important work is *Kashf al-ḥā’il fī al-ta’rīf bi-kutub al-fatāwā wa-l-nawāzil* – a biographical dictionary of the scholars of Timbuktu up until his own time, which runs to 335 folios, and was completed in the year 2000. The original manuscript in Cheikh Hamou’s hand remains in his possession, but he has circulated a digitized copy; a typescript of the handwritten text is in preparation under his supervision. It is a manuscript in

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1 Hunwick et al. 2003, 64–66.

his own hand with a number of digital copies circulating. This work was completed after the *Arabic Literature of Africa* was published and therefore is not in Hunwick's list. Virtually all Cheikh Hamou's works are in manuscript form and in his own hand, such as the text translated and introduced here.

Cheikh Hamou has an intimate knowledge of the manuscript and scholarly world of Timbuktu since he is a product of it and has remained there as a teacher and writer through thick and thin; through the good times as well as through the drought, the civil wars and the recent rebel occupation. Cheikh Hamou has been an informant and consultant for many researchers working on the collections and manuscript traditions of Timbuktu. Thus, the brief text presented here is relevant because it explicates for the uninitiated some of the elements occasionally encountered in the manuscripts that can confuse a reader or researcher. The eight points he makes in it are an explanation of just a handful of the markings that are sometimes present in Timbuktu manuscripts. They inform us of how to fill spaces at the end of a line of writing, of how to make insertions when a line is full, of various ways in which stops can be indicated or attention can be drawn to an important topic, and of how to make abbreviations of authors' names and titles and so on.

This text is not an extensive, and certainly by no means a complete, guide to the markings of the writers and copyists of Timbuktu, but it is a most fascinating one. It points to a 'language' of signs that were shared by the scholarly community. It is, however, unclear how far back these signs go. Cheikh Hammou has written a more extensive work called *Dawr al-rumūz wa-l-jadāwil fī taṭbīq al-masā'il 'ind al-awā'il: taqdīm*, 35 folios, completed in Timbuktu in 2005. This work deals in some detail with various types of acronyms and abbreviations used by writers from the region. There has, as yet, been no research dedicated to this genre of writing, i.e. to texts which tell scholars in Timbuktu or in the wider West African scholarly world how to 'design' a text (although Hunwick mentions a guide on how to compose letters, by 'Umar b. Abī Bakr al-Ṣalghawī al-Kabawī al-Kanawī, known as Umaru Karki (d. 1934), titled *al-Sarḥa al-warīqa fī 'ilm al-wathīqah*).<sup>2</sup>

These are some texts guiding readers through 'editing' marks and there may be more such works in the libraries of Timbuktu. What they point to is a writing culture that was developing a set of shared practices and symbols. Texts did not only have content, but also signs that revealed skill and authority. Writing had become an inherent part of Timbuktu and of similar locations, and the writing of texts developed a whole set of secondary elements pertaining to 'editing'. Further

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<sup>2</sup> Hunwick et al. 2003, 590.



## 2 *Addendum on the techniques of the copyists: translation of the text*

When the specific space for writing is full and there remains a word, or two or three letters, the scribe may continue to connect the excluded word in the specific place of writing at the end of the lines as usual (two set of symbols approximating the shape of five circles and 5 Arabic letters *ṭā* connected to a slash). Scribes use these forms to fill some of the empty spaces if it disturbs the order of the writing or also use them to erase a whole line or lines. Stop here – Note here – Stop – Note here. This is for alerting the reader to the importance of this place or its uniqueness and they may embellish it like this: (Drawing of possible decoration patterns around the words note and stop). These embellishments are also used for page numbers at the bottom. Within this decoration, scribes may also write a special title to show its importance or a sentence that summarizes the main concept.

And in the introduction to the works of *nawāzil* and *fatāwā*, the sources may be indicated by symbols that may be of different types, like ‘*ayn qāf*’ for ‘Abd al-Bāqī and others that are found in the commentary on the *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* by Abū al-Ḥasan; for example, *kāf* for al-Karmā’ī; *zā*’ for al-Zarkashī; and *sīn* for al-Suyūṭī; *dāl* for al-Damāmanī; or they can indicate the title of the books, etc. with symbols. There may also be found on manuscripts verses in praise of the scribe, or prayers to those who are interested in the book, and also prayers to those who changed it or had no interest in it. In the commentaries, to distinguish between the text and the commentary, scribes use the letter *ṣād* to refer to the text (from Arabic *al-naṣṣ*, the text) and *shīn* to the commentary (from the Arabic *al-sharḥ*, the commentary).

Scribes also use the word *ilhāq* or *mulḥaq* (addendum). This indicates that what was written previously is supplemented by what follows. ‘Test the ink’ or ‘test the pen’ signals the writing of a poem on the cover of the book or on the top page.

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Alessandro Gori

# Seven Gravestones at the Muslim Tana Baru Cemetery in Cape Town: A Descriptive Note

**Abstract:** The present paper deals with a small corpus of seven funerary inscriptions in Arabic and in mixed Arabic/Malay found in the Tana Baru Islamic cemetery in Cape Town. The article contains a description of the gravestones, as well as a translation and critical analysis of the text of the epitaphs. The items are studied from both a linguistic and a historical perspective with the aim of improving our knowledge of Islamic epigraphy in South Africa. At the same time, the inscriptions offer new information on the prosopography of the Muslim community of the Western Cape region, information which, it is hoped, will trigger further research on Islamic culture and history in South Africa.

## 1 Introduction

Tana Baru (Malay: *Tanah Baru*, lit. ‘the new ground’) is the historical cemetery of the Muslim community of Cape Town.<sup>1</sup> It is located in the Bo Kaap quarter,<sup>2</sup> on the slopes of the Signal Hill, at the end of Longmarket Street and it has been the first and main Islamic burial place in Cape Town since around 1805 until its official closure by government decree on sanitary grounds on January 15 1886.<sup>3</sup> The act of closure provoked wide and deep dissatisfaction among local Muslims: on January 17 1886, only two days after the decree had been issued, 3000 Muslims buried a child there defying the law. Clashes followed and lasted for three days; 12 people were arrested in the aftermath of the violent confrontations. However,

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The data published in this contribution have been elaborated in the framework of the project ‘Islam in the Horn of Africa, A Comparative Literary Approach’ (European Research Council Advanced Grant no. 322849 for the period 2013–2018).

1 The history of Islam in Cape Town, in particular of its early presence and diffusion, still presents many unstudied or understudied aspects. However, for the reconstruction of the general historical, cultural and linguistic development of Cape Muslim community (especially of the so-called Malay Muslims) there is already substantial literature. See, amongst others Du Plessis 1972.

2 Bo Kaap (Over the Cape, also formerly known as Malay quarter) is the historical centre of the so-called Kaap Malay community. See Du Plessis 1945, 1953, 1972.

3 On the background of the closure of Tana Baru, see Davids 1985, 95–112.

the presence of tombstones indicating the burial places of people who died in the early 1900s (for instance, an eighteen-month old girl named Waradea, buried in 1916), indicates that, with all likelihood, the cemetery continued to be used. During the following decades, the cemetery passed through a period of inexorable decadence. However, in 1978 the Committee for the Preservation of the Tana Baru was established, under the leadership of Imam Manie Bassier. Thanks to the public initiatives of many representatives of the Muslim Malay community and in particular, to the cultural and academic activities of the late Achmat Davids,<sup>4</sup> the Tana Baru Trust was eventually registered as a legal entity in 1998 to ensure ‘the protection, preservation, and conservation of the historic Tana Baru cemetery’.<sup>5</sup>

Tana Baru occupies a position of primary importance in the sacred geography of the Muslims of the Cape region because it hosts the shrines (Malay: *k[a]ramat*)<sup>6</sup> of some of the most eminent representatives of the early Muslim community and directly mirrors the history of the Islamic presence in the area.<sup>7</sup> In particular, the cemetery contains the mausoleum of *imām* ‘Abdallāh b. *qāḍī* ‘Abd al-Salām (popularly known under the nickname of Tuan Guru, ‘Mister Teacher’; d. 1807), originally a prince from Tidore (Maluku/Moluccas archipelago), who for unknown reasons was arrested by the Dutch in around 1780 and banished to the notorious Robben Island (Afrikaans *Robbeneiland*) in Table Bay (Cape Town). Once released from prison in 1783, Tuan Guru was able to establish the first Islamic school in Cape Town and in 1795, he became the first imam of the first mosque in Cape Town (indeed in the whole of South Africa): the Auwal Masjid in Dorp Street.<sup>8</sup> Tuan Guru is especially remembered among Cape Muslims for his conscientious teaching which was probably the earliest diffusion of Islamic learning in

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4 Achmat Davids (1939–1998) was a linguist and historian, a social educator and a respected representative of the Kaap Malay community. His numerous publications are a crucial contribution to the study of Islamic literature in Afrikaans in the Arabic script and to the history of the Muslims of Cape Town.

5 For more information, see the website of the Tana Baru Trust: <http://www.tanabaru.co.za> (last accessed 19/07/2016).

6 The Malay-Indonesian word *kramat* is a loanword from Arabic *karāma(t)* ‘prodigy, divine gift’. The meaning ‘holy place, shrine’, is apparently an extension of the semantic range of the Arabic word. Several *kramat*-s are scattered in the Cape region (for a list of the *kramat*-s of the area see *Guide* 2010).

7 For a description of the main *kramat*-s of Tana Baru and the most outstanding personalities who are buried there, see Davids 1985, 33–63; for the graves of the famous representatives of the Islamic community that disappeared after the forced closure of the cemetery, see Davids 1985, 64–78.

8 The history of the *masjid al-awwal* in Cape Town is reconstructed in Bradlow-Cairns 1978, 9–39 (see also <http://auwalmasjid.co.za/index.html>).



Cape Town.<sup>9</sup> In order to instruct his pupils and disciples, he made use of the manuscript texts in Arabic and Malay that he had managed to write or copy during his imprisonment.<sup>10</sup> No complete list of Tuan Guru's manuscripts and works is so far available although some of his Malay manuscript texts have been hastily catalogued;<sup>11</sup> however, except for his *Ma'rifat al-Islām wa'l-imān wa'l-ihsān*, which has been translated into English,<sup>12</sup> most of his texts still have to be analysed in detail.

Another much revered *kramat* in the Tana Baru cemetery is that of the first official imam of the Cape Muslim community, *sayyid* 'Alawī (locally known as Tuan Said Aloewie, d. 1803).<sup>13</sup> Just as Tuan Guru after him, he too was banished to Robben Island in 1744. After his release, he became a policeman and is believed to have made enormous efforts to teach the tenets of Islam to the local population, despite the prohibition of practicing any religion other than Protestantism, a ruling enforced by the Dutch authorities at that time. Considered to be endowed with supernatural powers, his grave was originally very simple but later an imposing shrine was built on it to enhance the memory of the *wali*.<sup>14</sup> The cemetery also contains the tomb of Abū Bakr Effendi (d. 1880), another influential

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9 Tuan Guru was a follower of the *shāfi'i* law school and the *ash'arī* theological stream.

10 Davids 1985, 40–48; 2011, 69–75.

11 *Katalog* 1998, 13, 53–60.

12 'Abd al-Salam 2004 (Engl. translation by Auways Rafudeen). An image of the colophon of a manuscript of Tuan Guru is given in Davids 1985, 43. Comparing the text in this image with the description of *Katalog* 1998, 60, it appears that the colophon in the image is the one in the manuscript of the South African Library MSB 683, 1(1) B Restricted access, part (H), 482–600 containing the *Bidāyat al-mubtadi' bi-faql Allāh al-Muhdī*, a basic guide to Islamic practice and cult in Jawi (other testimonies of the text: Museum Negeri Banda Aceh 07\_00256, catalogued on line <http://nusantara.dl.uni-leipzig.de>; Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia Jakim Collection IAAM 1998.1.362, IAAM 1998.1.935, catalogued *Handlist* 2010, 80, 173; printed in Singapore in 1861 by Muḥammad Arshad b. Qāsim al-Jāwī). The colophon dates the finishing of the copying of the text as Monday, 14 *rabī' al-thānī* 1201 (the number was written later over the line) at the time of *zuhr*; this corresponds to Feb. 3 1787 (it was a Saturday). At that time Tuan Guru was still in detention on Robben Island. It is interesting to note the terminology used in the colophon: *kātibuh imām 'Abdallāh al-maẓlūm b. al-maẓlūm qāḍī 'Abd al-Salām al-tindūrī baladan al-shāfi'i maḥaban al-ash'arī 'aqīdatan*, where the epithet *al-maẓlūm* (the oppressed) used by Tuan Guru for both himself and his father points to a family history of injustice and imprisonment.

13 The title *sayyid* and the name 'Alawī could point to a Yemeni 'sharifian' origin. Local tradition makes him a citizen of *Mukhā* where the Dutch had a trading post. It is not clear whether he was arrested by the Dutch in Yemen or in Indonesia.

14 For more information on Tuan Said Aloewie see Davids 1985, 48–52, *Guide* 2010, 42–43, <http://www.tanabaru.co.za/sites/tuan-said-aloeuwie>. For some other *kramat*-s in the cemetery see Davids 1985, 35–39, *Guide* 2010, 44–45, <http://www.tanabaru.co.za/sites/tuan-nuruman>

figure in the history of Islam (and of literacy in Arabic script) in the Cape. Sent to the Cape by the Ottoman Sultan Abdülmecid I (d. 1861) at the request of the British Queen Victoria (d. 1901) in order to settle some disputes in the Muslim community of the Cape, he was responsible for the introduction of the *ḥanafī* school of law in Cape Town, as well as for a reform of the Arabic-Afrikaans writing system.<sup>15</sup> The tomb of Abū Bakr Effendi, located in the upper section of the cemetery, has recently been renovated thanks to a project funded by the Turkish government.



**Fig. 1:** The entrance gate of the Tana Baru cemetery. The funerary inscriptions studied in this note are visible on the wall behind the gate. © Amir Golabi.

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(the grave of Paay Schaapie de Oude, also known as Imam Norman and Tuan Nuruman), Davids 1985, 53–63, <http://www.tanabaru.co.za/sites/abubakr-effendi> (the grave of Abū Bakr effendi) and <http://www.tanabaru.co.za/sites/ibn-amaldien/> (the grave of Ibn Amal al-Dīn; the child who was buried in Tana Baru after the authorities had shut it down).

<sup>15</sup> On Abu Bakr Effendi, see Versteegh 2015.



**Fig. 2:** The *kramat*-s of Tuan Guru (right) and Tuan Said Aloewie. In the background, the city of Cape Town. © Amir Golabi.

## 2 Funerary inscriptions at Tana Baru

During a recent visit to the cemetery,<sup>16</sup> my attention was drawn to some Arabic funerary inscriptions on the wall just behind the main gate. As no previous description of these epigraphic documents is available, I decided (in agreement with my South African colleagues) to devote a very short note to a first analysis of this small corpus of texts which I think can be of interest in different fields of research. Firstly, for Islamic epigraphy in general (in particular for the funerary epigraphy and the typological study of gravestones),<sup>17</sup> the items from Tana Baru are remarkable specimens of the inscriptional practises of the Muslims of the

<sup>16</sup> The visit took place within the framework of the project ‘The Islamic literary tradition in Sub-Saharan Africa: a new academic network’ supported for the year 2016 by the Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation.

<sup>17</sup> It seems that funerary inscriptions, gravestones and tombstones have received less attention than monumental inscriptions or inscriptions on artefacts (for example in the otherwise wonderful handbook by Blair 1998).

Western Cape region which have so far remained unstudied.<sup>18</sup> In particular it can be hoped that a comparative analysis of the structural and graphic features of these Cape Town inscriptions can highlight similarities with and differences from Islamic epigraphic material in Southeast Asia.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, for the general history of the Islamic community of Cape Town, the inscriptions I present here yield information which can further our knowledge of the prosopography of the city's Muslims, especially of the local intellectual elite, which is still only partially known. Finally, linguistically the texts of the inscriptions represent an interesting mixture of Arabic and Malay<sup>20</sup> and can shed new light on the relationships between these two languages among the Western Cape Muslims, possibly opening a perspective of research on the use of Arabic in the southernmost part of the African continent.

I was able to photograph seven Tana Baru inscriptions, four complete and three fragmentary. In this paper, I number them from one to seven, in random order. Two of them (nos 1 and 6) are clearly dated, two other (nos 5 and 7) contain an incomplete chronological reference, and three (nos 2, 3, 4) are not datable. The chronological range covered by my small corpus stretches from the first half of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century covering a period of time which partially postdates the official closure of the cemetery. The twentieth-century inscriptions were thus taken to their present location in Tana Baru quite recently or perhaps, as suggested above, the cemetery continued to be used by the local Muslim community after its official closure.

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**18** So far, the only available contribution to Islamic funerary epigraphy in South Africa (Harijadi 2014) is a brief survey of 65 tombstones of three sites located in the Eastern Cape province: the South End Valley Cemetery (Port Elisabeth; 26 tombstones), the Saabireen Islamic Library (Port Elizabeth; two tombstones coming from the Jubilee Park Cemetery in Uitenhage) and Jubilee Park Cemetery (Uitenhage; 37 tombstones).

**19** On early Islamic epigraphy in the Indonesian archipelago see the general volume Yatim/Nasir/Kassim 1990.

**20** The general issue of linguistic usage (Arabic, Arabic mixed with local languages – as in Tana Baru – or only local languages) in Islamic funerary epigraphy has not been addressed so far. On this point see the very interesting scheme for Tatarstan in Yusupov 1960, 38–41 and a quite marginal observation in Prokosch 1993. Among the 65 tombstones of the Eastern Cape published in Harijadi 2014 five inscriptions in the South End Valley Cemetery of Port Elizabeth, one in the Saabireen Islamic Library of Port Elizabeth and 24 in the Jubilee Park Cemetery of Uitenhage are in Arabic; the rest are in a mix of Arabic and Indonesian.



**Fig. 3:** Inscription 1. © Amir Golabi.



**Fig. 4:** Inscription 2. © Amir Golabi.



**Fig. 5:** Inscription 3. © Amir Golabi.



**Fig. 6:** Inscription 4. © Amir Golabi.



**Fig. 7:** Inscription 5. © Amir Golabi.



**Fig. 8:** Inscription 6. © Amir Golabi.

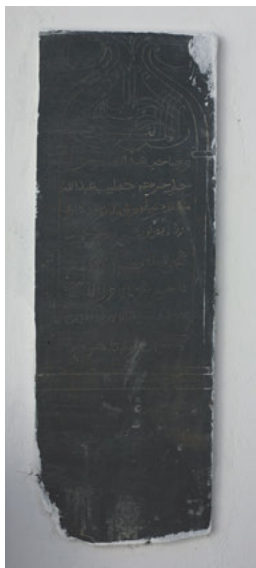


Fig. 9: Inscription 7. © Amir Golabi.

## Inscription 1

### Text and transliteration<sup>21</sup>

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم/ انا لله وانا اليه رجعون/ وصاحب هذه القبور/ سيخ عبد الجبر تد/  
 قولغ كرحمة الله تعالى د/ قول ليم هاري/ درقد بولن سوال هار/ سبت هجرة النبي ص  
 م/ سريب دو رتس انم قو [ل] و تاهن ه ا ه

*Bi-smillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm/Innā li-llāh wa-innā ilayh r[ā]ji‘ūn/wa-ṣāḥib  
 hā[dh]i al-qubūr/[sh]aykh ‘Abd al-Jabbār tadi/pulang keraḥmat Allāh ta‘ālī d/ua*

<sup>21</sup> The transcriptions with Arabic characters faithfully represent the texts as they are written on the inscriptions. The transliterations contain emendations marked by square brackets (although not in the case of the common defective writing of the letter *alif*), missing letters due to damage are not emphasized. Proposals for better readings and interpretations are given in the translations and commentaries.



*pul[uh] lima hari/daripada bulan [sh]awwāl har[i]/sabt hijrat al-nabī šād mīm/seribu diu ratus enam pu/[l]u[h] tahun hā' alif nūn.*<sup>22</sup>

### Translation

In the name of God the Compassionate the Merciful/ We surely belong to God and to Him we shall return (Quran, 2:156)/the one who is buried in this grave is *shaykh* 'Abd al-Jabbār/he just moved to the mercy of God the Highest/on the 25/of the month of *shawwāl* the day/of Saturday on the hijra of the Prophet (PBUH)/one thousand two hundred sixty/year h a n.

### Commentary

The rectangular inscription is thus datable to the 25 *shawwāl* 1260 (7.11.1844) which however was a Thursday and not a Saturday. The text is carved on slate. The opening *basmala* is written in a kind of geometric style showing prolonged superior strokes of the *alif*-s and *lām*-s, of the initial *bā'* and of the final *mīm*-s and *nūn* which intermingle. This shape partially resembles the graphic forms appearing in some sixteenth century gravestones from Pahang and in many of the tombstones of the Eastern Cape.<sup>23</sup> Apart from some common misspellings, there is repeated splitting of the words at the end of the line, a practice which is relatively well attested in epigraphy but is rare in manuscripts.<sup>24</sup> Textually, the epitaph contains verse 156 of *sūrat al-baqara* which is a very appropriate Quranic passage for gravestones.<sup>25</sup> From a linguistic point of view, the use of the Arabic

<sup>22</sup> The meaning of these three letters is not clear: similar detached letters also appear in some of the inscriptions published in Harijadi 2014 (see below note 32).

<sup>23</sup> Yatim/Nasir/Kassim 1990, 78–82; Harijadi 2014, *passim*.

<sup>24</sup> The manuscripts of the Horn of Africa are an exception in this respect, as division of the words at the end of the line is very widespread.

<sup>25</sup> A comparative study of the Quranic passages appearing on Islamic funerary inscriptions is still a desideratum. It is interesting to note that Quran 2:156 does not appear in the texts of the funerary inscriptions of the Malay-Indonesian area analyzed in Yatim/Nasir/Kassim 1990, *passim*. Nor is it found in the material collected by Yusupov 1960 in Tatarstan or by Moaz-Ory 1977 in Damascus. Nor is any study of Quranic quotations on Ottoman gravestones to be found in the very good handbook, Prokosch 1993. In contrast this passage from *sūrat al-baqara* is very well attested in the tombstones of the Eastern Cape (Harijadi 2014) where it appears 16 times in the tombstones of the South End Valley Cemetery, once in those kept in the Saabireen Islamic Library and 14 times in those of the Jubilee Park Cemetery. In the inscriptions on the Islamic architectural structures studied by Dodd/Khairallah 1981 the verse is only attested twice: in Sivas on the inscription on the lintel of the doorway of the mausoleum of Kaykāvūs I, dated 1220, and in

word *qubūr* as a singular (instead of *qabr*) is almost certainly caused by the interference of Malay *kubur* ('grave', where the Arabic plural has been borrowed and used as a singular).<sup>26</sup>

## Inscription 2 (fragment)

### Text and transliteration

الله الرحيم [ن] / ال / ان لله / اليه ر / وحا / القبوران [ت] / وفيت د / هـ

*Allāh al-Raḥmā[n] /inna li-llāh[wa-innā] ilayh r[āji‘ūn]/wa-ḥa[y]ā/al-qubūr an [tu]/wuffiyat dar/h*

### Translation

In the name of God the Compassionate the Merciful/ We surely belong to God and to Him we shall return (Quran, 2:156)/and the life/this is the grave of/she passed away on/of the hijra.

### Commentary

The rectangular inscription on slate is inserted into a frame representing a gate between columns and surmounted by a fronton: in particular, the *basmala* is contained in a triangular pediment above which is a palm. Graphically, the letters are not so different from those in Inscription 1. The text is too fragmentary to allow any assessment: again, in this gravestone verse Quran 2:156 is quoted. The tentative reading *tuwuffiyat* hints that the grave is that of a woman.

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Delhi above the central *mihṛāb* inside the mausoleum of Iltutmish [Altamash], 1233 (see Dodd/Khairallah 1981, vol. 1, 6).

<sup>26</sup> *Qubūr* instead of *qabr* is commonly used in the tombstones discussed in Harijadi 2014 where it is attested not only in mixed Arabic Indonesian inscriptions but also in many purely Arabic texts (Harijadi 2014, 62, 65, 81, 89, 99, 102, 103, 105).

## Inscription 3

### Text and transliteration

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم / لا اله الا الله محمد رسول الله صلي الله عليه وسلم ايند / قبورت  
 رأسودين / ابن هبان تمت / والله اعلم

*Bi-smillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm/lā ilāha illā Allāh Muḥammad rasūl Allāh/ṣallī Allāh ‘alayh wa-sallam inidi/qubūrt Ra’sūddīn ibn Hibbān tammāt/wa-Allāh ‘al-ima.*

### Translation

In the name of God the Compassionate the Merciful/There is no god but God. Muḥammad is the messenger of God/may God’s peace and blessings be upon him this here/is the grave of Ra’sūddīn ibn Hibbān it is finished/and God knows best.

### Commentary

The rectangular inscription on slate does not present any graphic peculiarity (final *yā*’ for *alif maqṣūra* is a very common feature; see here also Inscription 1) but it is interesting that the shape of the ‘*ayn* in the final line *Allāh ‘alima* (line 5) is curved to resemble a crescent. The reading of the text offers the following three difficulties: 1) I tend to the interpretation that the final *tā*’ in *qubūrt* is a misspelling for a final *nūn* with three dots (نْ) to be read as *-nya* (suffix pronoun third person singular);<sup>27</sup> 2) I read the name of the buried person as Ra’s al-Dīn b. Hibbān; the *wāw* in Ra’sū and the *hā*’ in Hibbān could be mistakes;<sup>28</sup> 3) the phrase *Allāh ‘alima* (God knows) on line 5 could be a miswriting of the very common formula *Allāh a‘lam*.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> A spelling (*tā* for *nya*) is attested in three funerary inscriptions in Jubilee Park in Uitenhage (Harijadi 2014, 96, 104, 107).

<sup>28</sup> Other possible readings could be Ra’is al-Dīn for the personal name and Nu’mān for the patronymic.

<sup>29</sup> The formula could sound somewhat clumsy in this context, as if the lapicide was not sure about the identity of the person buried in the grave for which he was writing the gravestone. As a matter of fact, however, the phrase can be found very often in the funerary inscriptions of the Eastern Cape (Harijadi 2014, 42, 43, 44, 47, 48, 51, 52, 54, 55, 58, 57, 60, 61, 71, 74, 75, 77, 78, 79, 80, 83, 84, 102, 103, 105) where the uncertainty of the lapicide about the year of the death of the buried person is mentioned (not his identity like here). As far as the text is concerned, the presence of the verb *tammāt* is noticeable: the verb is very commonly used in the closing formulas of

## Inscription 4

### Text and transliteration

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم/لا اله الا الله محمد/رسول الله صلي الله عليه وسلم/انا لله وانا اليه  
رجعون/هذه القبر صاحب حلفه/سلم ابن امام عبد الرحمن/وكان وفته في ايام السبت/اثن  
ايام من شهر دالقعيدة/وكان عمر اربع وعشرين سنه/وفي سسه خ والله علم هجرة النبي صم  
تم/ ٢١ ت

*Bi-smillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm//lā ilāha illā Allāh Muḥammad/rasūl Allāh ṣallī  
Allāh ‘alayhi wa-sallam/innā li-llāh wa-innā ilayh r[ā]ji‘ūn/ hā[dh]ihi al-qabr ṣāhib  
ḥalfah/Salām ibn imām ‘Abd al-Raḥmān/wa-kāna wafatuh fī ayyām al-sabt/ithn  
ayyām min shahr [dh]ū al-qa‘ida/wa kāna ‘umr arba‘ wa-‘ishrīna sana/wa-fī sana  
tsim wa-allāh ‘alima hijrat al-nabī šm tamma/21 t.*

### Translation

In the name of God the Compassionate the Merciful/There is no god but God  
Muḥammad/ is the messenger of God may God's peace and blessings be upon  
him/We surely belong to God and to Him we shall return (Quran, 2:156)/This  
grave is of the one of good character/Salām ibn *imām* ‘Abd al-Raḥmān/his de-  
cease was on the day of Saturday/two days passed of the month of *dhū al-  
qa‘da*/his age was 24 years/and in the year *tsim* and God knows best of the hegira  
of the Prophet (PBUH) it is finished/21 t.

### Commentary

The rectangular inscription is on slate. Graphically it looks very similar to the pre-  
vious three steles. The opening *basmala* is written in an embellished form where  
the final *mīm*-s of *ism* and *al-Raḥīm*, the final *nūn* of *al-Raḥmān* and the *rā’* of *al-  
Raḥīm* are connected together. The text of the inscription is in Arabic without Ma-  
lay but with some morphological mistakes (feminine used instead of masculine  
and vice versa) and some banal misspellings. The gravestone also presents some  
reading difficulties: 1) on line five I tend to interpret *ḥalfah* as a misspelling for  
*khilqa* ([good] character, quality); 2) the presence of a *ḥā’* with three dots above  
(typically used in Pashto) is remarkable but I think that in this case the three dots

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manuscript texts. In the inscriptions of the Eastern Cape it is also sporadically attested (Harijadi  
2014, 44, 88, 96).

simply indicate that the letter has to be considered as an abbreviation, possibly of the word *ta'riḫ* (date); 3) also on this inscription (as in inscription 3) the phrase *Allāh 'alima* (God knows) could be read as *Allāh a'lam*; 4) the presence in the text of the verb *tamma* should also be noticed, similar to but different from inscription 3 where *tammāt* was used; 5) unfortunately the date given in the inscription is incomplete and imprecise. The final numbers seem to hint at [12]21 (1807 when 2 of *dhū al-qa'da* was November 11, a Sunday) or [13]21 (1904, when 2 of *dhū al-qa'da* was January 20, a Wednesday). However, the dating problem cannot be solved, as no information is available on the person mentioned on the gravestone.

## Inscription 5 (fragment)

### Text and transliteration

ابو عبد الخلق/والله علم

*Abū 'Abd al-Khaliq/wa-Allāh 'alima*

### Translation

Abū 'Abd al-Khāliq /and God knows best.

### Commentary

This fragmentary text is written on a rectangular stele. The form of the *'ayn* in *Allāh 'alima* (line 2) is curved to resemble a crescent and is almost identical to the one found in inscription 3 line 5. It could be that the two inscriptions were written by the same lapicide. No information is available on the identity of the Abū 'Abd al-Khāliq mentioned on the gravestone.

## Inscription 6 (fragment)

### Text and transliteration

حبيبة /زوجة الحاج عبد/المجد المتوفية/ ١٨ رمضان المكرم/سنة ١٣١٩

*biya Ḥabiba/zawjat al-ḥāj 'Abd/al-Majbd al-mutawaffiya/18 ramadān al-mukar-ram/sana 1319*

## Translation

[Ḥājj]iya Ḥabība/wife of al-ḥājj ‘Abd/al-Majīd who passed away/on the 18<sup>th</sup> of the venerable month of *ramaḍān* /of the year 1319.

## Commentary

The text is written on a fragmented marble plate and it is inserted into a frame which ends in the shape of a domed triangle embellished by fleurons. Graphically this stele differs from the others in the corpus because of the wide and rounded, well carved letters. I read the first word on line 1 as *ḥājjīya*, relating it to the title *ḥājj* carried by her husband, hypothesizing that the couple performed the pilgrimage to Mecca together. The hijra date corresponds to the Gregorian 29.12.1901 (it was a Sunday)<sup>30</sup> when the cemetery of Tana Baru was already closed. The gravestone could thus have been carried to its present location from another place. No information is available on the two personages mentioned in the epitaph.

## Inscription 7

### Text and transliteration

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم / وصاحب هذا القبور / علي حرمت خطيب عبد الله / من غفل دنيا دو  
قوله توج هاري / در قد بولن محرم هرين / حمس / هجرة نبي صم ١٢٩ / كغد تاهن خ الاول  
الله / يرحمه رحمة الابرار / امين / عمرت انم بوله تاهن

*Bi-smillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm/wa-ṣāḥib hadā al-qubūrā/‘alī ḥurmat khaṭīb ‘Abdallāh/meningal dunyā dua puluh tujuh hari/ daripada bulan muḥarrām harin ḥamis/hijrat nabī ṣ.m. 129 kepada/tahun jīm al-awwal Allāh/yarḥamahu raḥamat al-abrār amīn/umrunya enam puluh tahun.*

## Translation

In the name of God the Compassionate the Merciful/the owner of this tomb/which is in honour of *khaṭīb* ‘Abdallāh /departed from this world on the 27/of the month of *muḥarrām* a Thursday/of the hijra of the Prophet (PBUH) 129/for the year *jīm*

<sup>30</sup> According to Gacek 2001, 125 the adjective *mukarrām* is used in manuscripts as an epithet of the months of *shawwāl* and *sha‘bān* but not of *ramaḍān*.

the first God/be Merciful with him as He does with the pious, amen!/His age was sixty.

### Commentary

The eight-line text is written on a rectangular slate and framed within a rectangle ending in a floral ogive, representing a gate between two columns. Graphically, the gravestone is very similar to Inscription 1. In particular, the opening *basmala* shows extended strokes of the *alif*-s and *lām*-s, intermingling final *mīm*-s and *nūn*-s and shows extended strokes on the *ḥā*'-s, which tend to resemble the head of a bird.

Linguistically the inscription is a mixed Arabic-Malay text and presents a few banal misspellings (e.g. *hadā* instead of *haḍā*; *harin* instead of *hārī*), grammatical inconsistencies or interferences between the two languages (*qubūr* for *qabr* as in Inscription 1; *yarḥamuh* rather than the more usual *raḥimahu*<sup>31</sup>) and also some reading difficulties. In particular: 1) the year of the death written in Arab Oriental numbers with three dots above, is incomplete and difficult to ascertain. I surmise that it is 27 *muḥarram* 12[90]–12[99] Anno Hegirae, i.e. a day falling between 27/03/1873 (which was a Thursday as stated in the inscription) and 19/12/1881; 2) the meaning of the phrase '*kepada/tahun jīm al-awwal*' (line 6) is not clear, where reference is made to a 'year *jīm* the first', while the abbreviation *jīm* written with three dots above could easily be read as *j[umādā] al-awwal*, the fifth month of the Islamic lunar calendar.<sup>32</sup> The facts which the text of the inscription leaves open could be clarified if biographical details of the *khaṭīb* 'Abdallāh mentioned in the gravestone were known; unfortunately, he remains unknown.

I sincerely hope that these few observations can pave the way to further, more profitable research on the Tana Baru gravestones and on the history, language and literature of the Muslim community of Cape Town.

<sup>31</sup> This formula is attested in Ottoman gravestones: Prokosch 1993, 78.

<sup>32</sup> A very similar abbreviation (*tahun jīm*) can be found in two inscriptions from the South End Valley Cemetery (Harijadi 2014, 44 [dated 1282 A.H.], 60 [dated 1290 A.H.]). Other abbreviations used in the corpus of inscriptions from the South End Valley Cemetery are: *tahun dāl* (Harijadi 2014, 45; dated 1282 A.H.; Harijadi 2014, 66; no year); *tahun alif* (Harijadi 2014, 50; dated 1288 A.H.); *tahun bā*' (Harijadi 2014, 57; dated 1293 A.H.). In an inscription from Jubilee Park in Uitenhage the abbreviation used is *tahun hā*' (Harijadi 2014, 82; not dated, possibly the *hā*' stays for hijra and the year is simply missing). Finally, reading the transcription of the text in Arabic script, an isolated *jīm* appears in an inscription from the Jubilee Park Cemetery of Uitenhage (Harijadi 2014, 77) in the phrase *Allāh jīm a'lam*; the same *jīm* is however moved to another line in the translation to again form the string *tahun gīm*. See also Harijadi 2014, 112 where the phenomenon of these unclear abbreviations is mentioned with no attempt to explain it.

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Maimadu Barma Mutai and Andrea Brigaglia

# Ka'ana Umar's 'CCI Quran': The Making of a Bornuan Manuscript in the Twenty-First Century

**Abstract:** This note describes the tools and the techniques used by Ka'ana Umar, a contemporary calligrapher based in Maiduguri, capital of Borno State (Nigeria), to produce a Quranic manuscript that is now preserved at the Centre for Contemporary Islam (CCI), University of Cape Town. The Quranic calligraphic tradition of Borno has been known for centuries as the most ancient and prestigious one in sub-Saharan Africa. Notwithstanding the many challenges it currently faces (from modernization to insecurity and the displacement of scribes), this tradition is still a living one, as the skills of Ka'ana Umar and of many of his peers in Borno amply demonstrate.

## 1 Introduction

When one of the authors of the present note was invited to participate in the conference on *The Arts and Crafts of Literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa* at the University of Cape Town, he presented a paper entitled 'Tools of Qur'ānic Literacy in Borno.' The paper offered an overview of the material culture of Bornuan Quranic manuscripts, describing pens, paper, inks and calligraphic aspects. To give a more vivid presentation, Mutai also brought with him a richly decorated Quranic manuscript that had been produced for the occasion by a Maiduguri-based calligrapher. During the conference, the manuscript was displayed as part of a small exhibition, and afterwards, it was offered as a gift to the CCI (Centre for Contemporary Islam), Department of Religious Studies, University of Cape Town, where it is presently preserved. In the following pages, the authors describe the various stages followed by the calligrapher who penned this manuscript and the other craftsmen involved in its production. The manuscript is here referred to as 'the CCI Quran'. Some excellent studies of Bornuan Quranic manuscripts are already

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In writing this article, the background provided by Dmitry Bondarev's work was especially crucial. The authors also wish to thank Bondarev for his precious advice on the correct transcription of Kanuri words.

available in the literature, from a ground-breaking article by Adrian D. H. Bivar,<sup>1</sup> to a detailed description by Adrian Brockett,<sup>2</sup> and of course the various studies (at the same time historical, linguistic and codicological) by Dmitry Bondarev.<sup>3</sup>

In writing this brief note, the authors wish to shift the perspective from the description of an object-manuscript preserved in a museum, a library or a private collection, to the narration of the process that led to the production of the manuscript itself. In this sense, this paper can be considered as a complement to Dmitry Bondarev's documentary 'Borno Calligraphy: Creating hand-written Qur'an in northeast Nigeria'.<sup>4</sup> By laying emphasis on the human subjects involved in the making of one particular handwritten copy of the Quran, the authors wish to present the Bornuan manuscript culture as a living legacy of the arts and crafts of literacy in Muslim Africa.

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<sup>1</sup> Bivar 1960, 199–205.

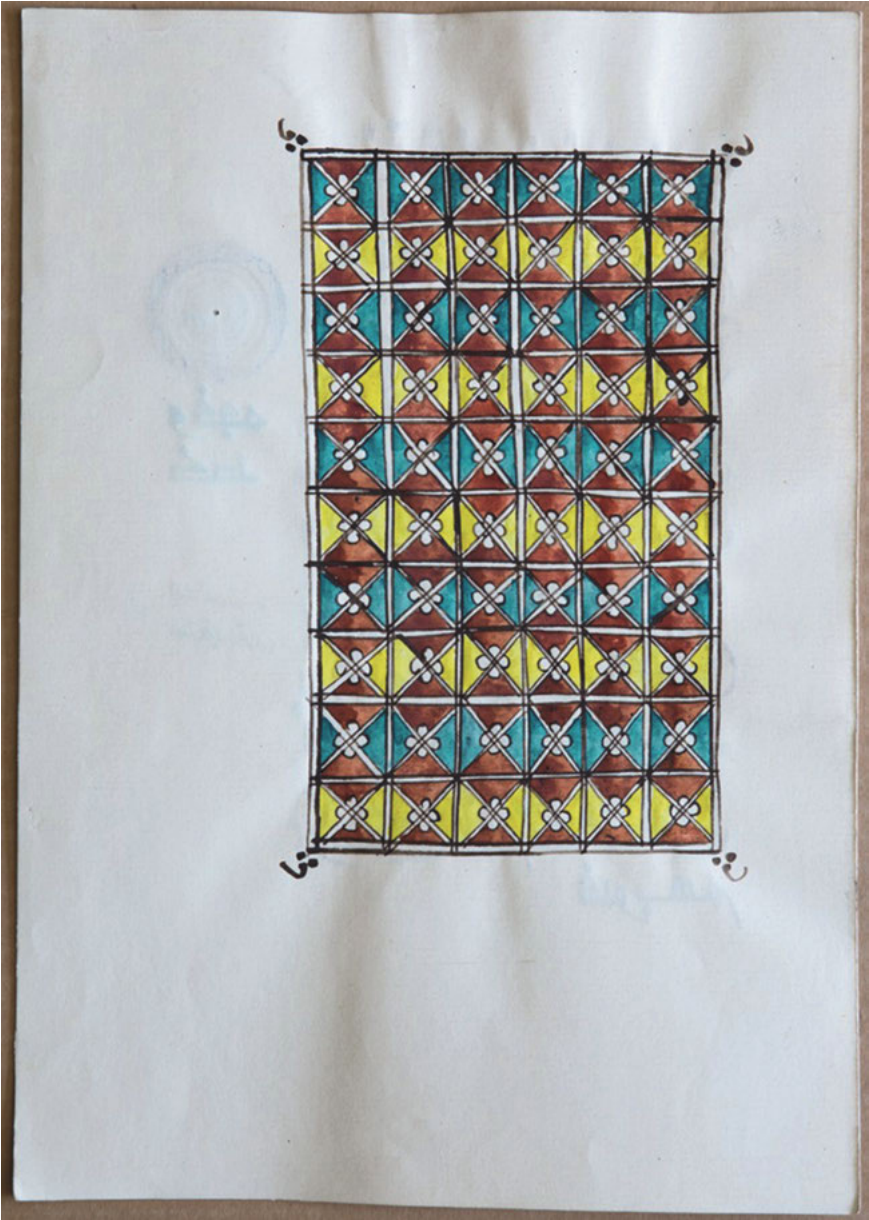
<sup>2</sup> Brockett 1987, 45–67.

<sup>3</sup> Bondarev 2006, 113–140.

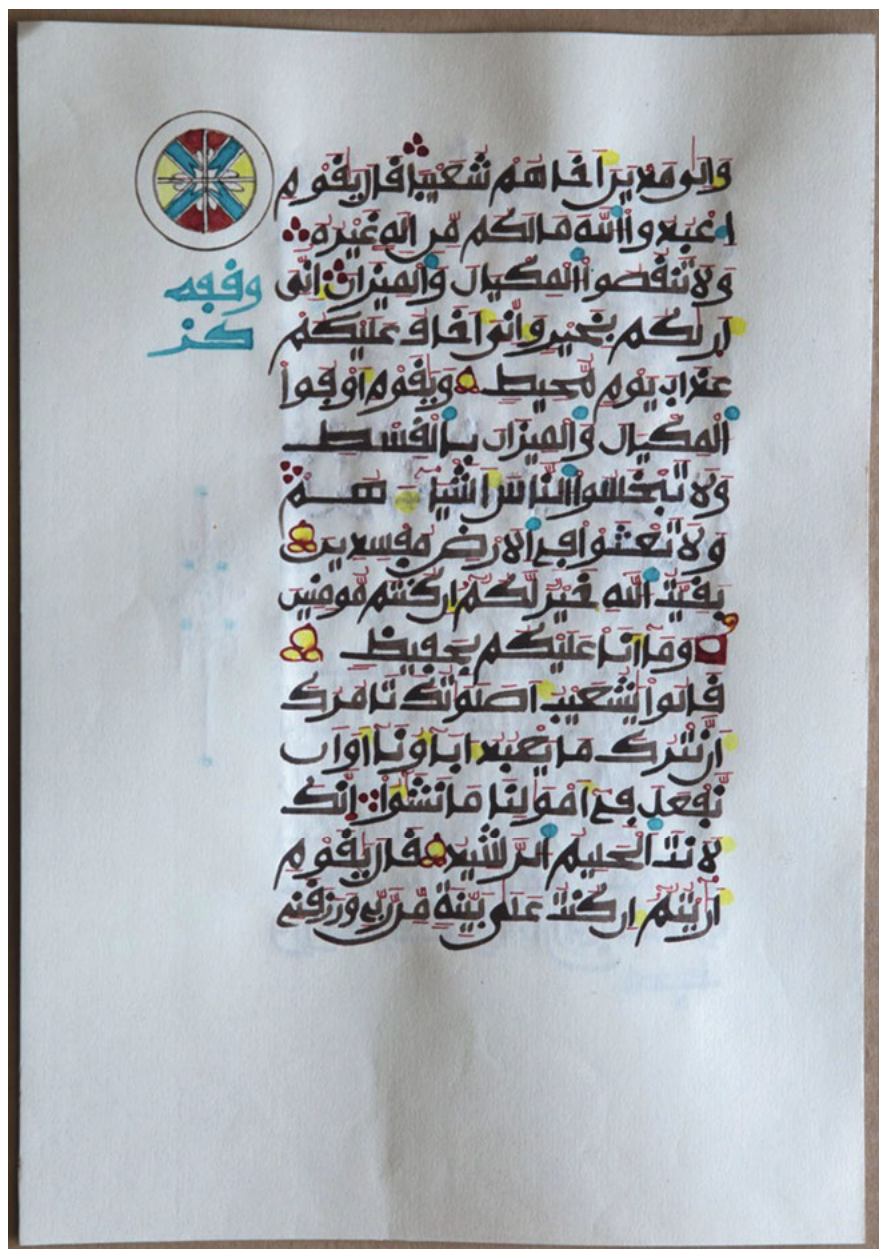
<sup>4</sup> Available online at: <https://www.openaccess.uni-hamburg.de/multimedia/kalligraphie-borno.html>.



Fig. 1: The first page of the CCI Quran. © Francesco Piraino.



**Fig. 2:** A decorative pattern on the second page of the CCI Quran. © Francesco Piraino.



**Fig. 3:** A page containing a rounded *hizb* marker. © Francesco Piraino.





**Fig. 4:** The decorative pattern marking a fourth of the Quran, at the beginning of Sūrat Maryam.  
 © Francesco Piraino.

## 2 Conception

The idea of bringing a Quranic manuscript to Cape Town was conceived by Maimadu Barma Mutai, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria, as part of his efforts to preserve and promote the traditional culture of Quranic calligraphy of Borno, which arguably constitutes the richest calligraphic culture in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>5</sup> This centuries-old tradition has been endangered for many years by the emergence of modernity with its challenges to traditional systems of knowledge transmission and to the various forms of craftsmanship that are associated with the production of manuscripts. The availability of cheap printed copies of the Quran has rendered the skills of the scribes less relevant today. However, as Andrea Brigaglia has already documented in the Nigerian context, there have been cases in which individual, exceptionally skilled scribes have redefined their traditional craftsmanship from that of an artisan to that of an artist, transforming themselves from scribes to calligraphers and thus maintaining their relevance in a rapidly changing market of literacy.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the threat posed by modernization, over the last few years a new, unexpected and much more dangerous threat to the continuity of the transmission of the Borno calligraphic tradition has emerged in the form of the Boko Haram insurgency that has devastated large parts of Borno state. Entire villages and towns have been displaced or destroyed, leading to the loss of numerous manuscripts. Several Muslim scholars, including some of those who practised calligraphy, have been directly targeted and murdered by the jihadist insurgents. Moreover the traditional Quranic schools—which are the institutions where the primary calligraphic skills are transmitted, and which are, for the most part, under the control of the Sufi orders—have found themselves under attack both by the insurgents who accuse them of promoting an allegedly ‘corrupted’ form of Islam, and by the government, who (unfairly) accuses them of providing a fertile ground for insurgent recruitment.<sup>7</sup> In this dramatic context, the urgency of saving and promoting the Borno tradition of Quranic scholarship, arts and craftsmanship, was what motivated Mutai to commission a local calligrapher to make a copy of the Quran to bring to Cape Town for display at the *Arts and Crafts of Literacy* conference.

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<sup>5</sup> See in particular Bivar 1968, 3–15; Brockett 1987, 195–223.

<sup>6</sup> Brigaglia 2011, in particular 61ff.

<sup>7</sup> See Hoechner 2014, 63–84.

### 3 The calligrapher

Among the many Bornuan calligraphers Mutai had met during his doctoral research,<sup>8</sup> he chose to ask this particular manuscript of a young Muslim scholar and calligrapher called Ka'ana (Kaka Gana) Umar b. Abba Kyari b. Umar b. Goni Shariff *Sələm* ('Black' in Kanuri) b. Goni Sharif *Bul* ('White' in Kanuri), simply known as Umar Abba Kyari or, more commonly, as Ka'ana Umar. In his brief career, Ka'ana Umar is credited with having already produced about twenty calligraphic copies of the Quran for various clients.

Ka'ana Umar was born in 1980 in a ward called Goni Awanari Chingoa, in the Magumeri Local Government area of Borno State. He spent his early childhood in his home village, before moving to the city of Maiduguri in 1987. In Maiduguri, he studied the Quran with his uncle, Goni Ali Umar Mairami (d. 1996), who had studied with Goni Jalo of Makintari village of Konduga Local Government Area and who was the imam of Alhaji Mala Dalorima's Mosque, in Abbaganaram Housing Estate, Maiduguri. Ka'ana Umar continued his study of the Quran under the mentorship of his uncle, until he memorized it at the age of sixteen. After the death of his uncle, he moved to the area of Shehuri North (also in Maiduguri), where he spent the following four years specializing in the skills of a calligrapher. He achieved his expertise by writing the Quran several times on a wooden slate (*allo*) and then washing it off, and writing it again and again.

Ka'ana Umar finally wrote the whole Quranic text for the first time on paper in the year 2000 in Shehuri, where he still lives with his wife and five children. This copy was offered as a gift to the family of his deceased teacher, Goni Ali Umar Mairami, following a practice that is encouraged by local tradition. The second copy he wrote was sold for six thousand Naira to Babukar Jalomi in the town of Fashar, near Ka'ana Umar's village of origin. The third copy was purchased for ten thousand Naira by Babukar's brother, Malam Fannami. All the first three copies of the Quran he wrote, although penned in a beautiful style, contained some minor errors, cancellations and corrections. Developing his skills further, however, Ka'ana Umar was later able to write a fourth, more beautiful copy for an undisclosed personality, who bought it, through the mediation of Ibrahim (Bra) Goni Jibir in Abbaganaram ward of Maiduguri, for a price of nineteen thousand Naira. This copy features no cancellation or correction and all vowels and minor orthographic signs appear at the right place, thus demonstrating Ka'ana Umar's consecration as a full-fledged calligrapher. More wealthy patrons were gradually

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<sup>8</sup> Mutai 2014.





**Fig. 5:** The calligrapher, Ka'ana 'Umar. © Maimadu B. Mutai.

attracted by the skills of the young calligrapher, whose fifth copy was sold to a State Commissioner in Damaturu, Yobe State of Nigeria, whose name the calligrapher could not recall.

In the following years, Ka'ana Umar continued to write copies of the Quran, firstly as a part-time hobby, then gradually as a veritable trade as well as for teaching purposes. In the context of the primary traditional educational institution in Borno, called *sangaya* (Quranic schools), the reading, memorization, and continuous writing down of the text of the Quran are the main activities for teachers and students, while other subjects (Hadith, Islamic law, theology etc.) and activities only have a secondary status. Ka'ana Umar is proud of the institution he runs, which is known as the Keskari circle and is located in Shehuri North of Maiduguri. Here, over thirty students of various levels study the art of writing in

the *Barnāwī* Arabic script<sup>9</sup> under a cousin of Ka'ana Umar, Goni Umara son of Goni Ali Umar Mairami. Unfortunately, the Goni and his students were all displaced by the Boko Haram insurgency in 2013. The writing of the CCI Quran, therefore, was initiated by Ka'ana Umar at the Keskari circle, but completed in exile, in another location.

The CCI Quran is the eighteenth complete Quranic manuscript produced by Ka'ana Umar in his life so far. All of the manuscripts from the fourth to the seventeenth—the calligrapher proudly remarks—have no cancellations or corrections. In the CCI Quran, however, a few corrections appear here and there. This is due to the fact that this particular copy has been produced under a very tight schedule in order to be ready before the client's trip to South Africa, but also to the fact that this copy was written during a time of exceptional tension and insecurity in Maiduguri, at the very peak of the Boko Haram crisis. Only two *ḥizb* (sixtieths) of the Quran, were written by the calligrapher in his permanent residence, where he normally keeps all his writing tools. All the rest were penned by Ka'ana Umar while living as an internally displaced person (IDP) in a camp located in the GRA (Government Reserved Area) of Maiduguri, and later as an IDP in another camp in Maduganari ward. The calligrapher was in such a distressed condition that he was close to giving up the task. It was only thanks to the constant encouragement of the client, and the latter's insistence on the importance of displaying the traditional skills of Borno calligraphers in South Africa, that he was finally able to complete the manuscript in Maduganari, by the grace of God.

## 4 The tools

Several tools were used by the calligrapher in producing this copy of the Quran, and many of them were taken to South Africa by the purchaser for display at the *Arts and Crafts of Literacy* conference. The materials used for the production of this manuscript include pens, paper, ink, and other support items as explained below.

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<sup>9</sup> For the argument that *Barnāwī* is a particular style of a traditional Arabic script that has developed independently in Central Africa (and not as a derivation of the *Maghribī* as previously assumed), see Brigaglia/Nobili 2013.

## 4.1 Paper

The paper used for this manuscript was obtained by the calligrapher at the Maiduguri Monday market. The paper bears the watermark 'Royal Executive Bond'. This is a thick (100gsm), high quality paper produced by BILT (Ballarpur Industries Limited) in India. In Maiduguri, it can be found in two markets, namely the Post Office stationery market and the Monday market. No paper is produced locally in Nigeria, and while Italian manufacturers like Andrea Galvani used to be the greatest suppliers in pre-colonial and colonial times, India has more recently taken over as the biggest exporter of paper used for manuscripts in Nigeria. Boxes of 500 BILT sheets are available in the market, as well as at selected bookshops in Maiduguri, but the larger (A1) size used for this manuscript is only available at the Monday market. The calligrapher purchased two bundles of A1-sized Royal Executive Bond paper, at the cost of five thousand Naira (ca. 30 US dollars). The A1-size (594 mm × 841 mm) folios used for this manuscript are cut into two. After removing some offcuts, the calligrapher obtains two folios of 265 mm × 380 mm. The folios thus obtained are then folded so as to obtain four pages of 265 mm (height) × 190 mm (width). This particular size folio, which is the standard one for decorative Quranic manuscript in Borno, is called *jamba* in Kanuri, while a smaller size, half of the *jamba*, is called *wadami* (lit. 'son of a dwarf', meaning 'short' in Kanuri). The paper also comes in different colours: the white, cream, and light green variants are usually associated with a thicker paper, which preserves the ink's natural colour for many years and is therefore preferred by the local calligraphers.

## 4.2 Pens

Pens for writing manuscripts in Borno are usually from a material called *suli*, *kangale* or *suwu* in Kanuri. A *suli* can be a piece of cornstalk, reed straw, cane-stem, or any of the many types of strong bamboo-like hollowed canes that are very common in the Lake Chad basin area. A pen (*alkalam*) is cut from the *suli* by using a simple razorblade that is obtainable from any street vendor. Cutting a pen is one of the first skills learnt by the pupils of the traditional Quranic schools. Some of the pens used for this particular copy by Ka'ana Umar are made of the reed straws commonly used for thatching (in Kanuri, *suli sigdibe*), some of which he purchased at the Maiduguri Monday market. Others are made of cornstalks (in Kanuri, *kangale ngawulibe*, 'stalk of guinea corn' or *kangale argambe* 'stalk of millet').

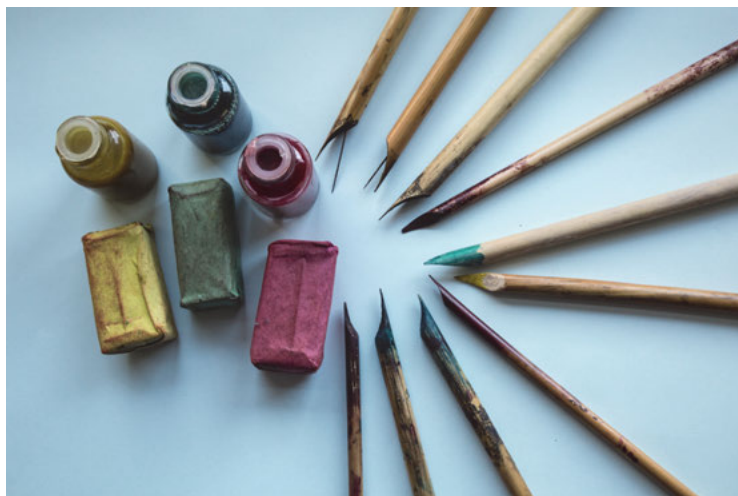
In writing the CCI Quran, Ka'ana Umar used seven different types of pen. Several of the pens were given to the purchaser along with the completed manuscripts and can be observed in Fig. 6. Bornuan Quranic manuscripts are always written in four colours: black, red, yellow and green. The various types of pen are named after the colour of the inks and the parts of the writing for which they are reserved. Ka'ana Umar gave the following list of the seven types of pen he used to write the CCI Quran:

- i. *Alkalam yambarbe* ('pen of/for red ink'). A thick-pointed pen used for writing, in black ink, the consonantal body of the text.
- ii. *Alkalam kime surabe* ('red pen of/for sura'). A thick-pointed pen used for writing, in red ink, the headings of each Sura.
- iii. *Alkalam zamibe* ('pen of/for yellow ink'). Used to write the letter *hamza* in yellow ink.
- iv. *Alkalam shikkalbe* ('pen of/for vowels'). A thin-pointed, red-ink pen used for vowels and illumination.
- v. *Alkalam libtarabe* ('pen of/for green ink'). Used to write the *hamzat al-waṣl* in green ink.
- vi. *Alkalam kuri kəritabe* ('pen of/for circling a circle'). Small compass, realized by attaching a needle to a pen and used for tracing the red circles that mark every *ashar*, i.e. every tenth verse of a given Sura.
- vii. *Alkalam hizb kurtabe* ('pen of/for tracing a *hizb*'). Small compass, realized by attaching a needle to a pen and used for markers of *hizb*, i.e. each sixtieth part of the Quran.
- viii. *Alkalam hizubram*. Double compass, realized by attaching a needle to a double-pointed pen. It is used to draw concentric circles for *hizb* markers.<sup>10</sup>

When writing the Quran, the Bornuan calligraphers use a specific technique, holding the pen in such a way as to give the desired calligraphic style. In Borno, pens are always held with the right hand, between the index and the middle finger, with the thumb pressed upon the pen, about two inches from the nib. This holding technique provides the calligrapher with the ability to manipulate his design with precision. Generally speaking, the pens retain the natural appearance of the materials they are made from. Contrary to other regions of the Muslim world, no specific decorations are usually made on the pens in Borno. The pens are used continuously until they are worn out and replaced with new ones. Two

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<sup>10</sup> Some Borno calligraphers use the common compass (*bahari*) for drawing the circles used in *ashar* and *hizbi* markers. Ka'ana Umar, however, prefers to use the more traditional technique described here, following a practice used by all the calligraphers working in his institutions.



**Fig. 6:** Samples of pens and inks used by Ka'ana 'Umar for the CCI Quran. © Francesco Piraino.



**Fig. 7:** The *alkalam hizubram* cut and used by Ka'ana 'Umar. © Francesco Piraino.

pens can be considered as the most fundamental ones for writing a complete Quran: one big pen, *alkalam yambarbe*, is used for writing the consonantal body of the text in black ink; one small pen, *alkalam shikkalbe*, is used for writing the vowels and parts of the illumination in red. In order to write a copy of the Quran of medium size, a calligrapher will need about ten pens of each of these two types.



**Fig. 8:** Traditional Borno pencases made from gourds and from braided straw.  
© Francesco Piraino.

### 4.3 Pen cases

Pens are kept by Borno scribes and calligraphers in pencases (called *fofiyo* in Kanuri), derived either from oblong gourds or from braided straws.

### 4.4 Inkpots

The traditional inkpot (*aduwaram* in Kanuri) is made of a small spherical gourd, to which leather strings are attached to allow the calligrapher to hang it on the wall for increased stability, or to carry it. Today, however, plastic containers are much more common, as they can be safely sealed to prevent the ink from spilling out. Ka'ana Umar normally uses such plastic pots.

### 4.5 Inks

Following the Bornuan tradition, the consonantal text of the CCI Quran is written in four colours: black, red, yellow and green. All the colours are produced locally using relatively inexpensive traditional recipes.



Fig. 9: The Traditional Bornuan inkpot. © Francesco Piraino.

#### 4.5.1 Black ink

The black ink used to write on paper is known as *yambar* in Kanuri. Various recipes are used in Borno for the production of *yambar*. The most common recipe is a mixture that includes *kəngar* seeds (*acacia nilotica*), a combination of iron oxides (*səmbal*), and gum arabic (*kango*). The purpose of the latter is to make the ink glossy. The most common type of gum arabic used in Borno is the one derived from the *kolkol* tree (*acacia senegal*). In some recipes, the *kango* (resin) of the tree called *karamga* (*acacia seya*) is also added. Charcoal is not used in the production of *yambar*, but it is a very common ingredient of the black ink used by Quranic students to write on their wooden Quranic boards. The charcoal, usually obtained from the wood of a tree called *cingo* or *cungo* (desert date tree, *balanites aegyptiaca*) is always the basic ingredient for the black ink used on wooden boards. In this case, the charcoal is reduced to powder and subsequently boiled for several hours with a mixture of gum arabic and water, until it acquires the desired density and texture. As the ink used on wooden boards is also normally washed off and drunk by the students, the recipes used for this purpose do not contain iron oxides, which are, on the contrary, a frequent ingredient of the inks used for writing on paper. However, the calligrapher of the CCI Quran, Ka'ana Umar, does not use iron oxides in producing his *yambar*. For the ink used to write the consonan-

tal body of the CCI Quran, he used gum arabic from *acacia senegal* (*kango kol-kolbe*), as well as *acacia nilotica* (*kəngar*), and then he let the concoction soak in water within a metal container, a procedure which—as he said—is sufficient to provide the required metallic content to the final product.

#### 4.5.2 Red ink

The red ink is known in Kanuri as *kimearam* and is used for the titles of Suras; for the vowels; for the pause markers (*wakaf*); for the tri-circular verse markers (*tusu*); for most of the marginal annotations; for the rounded decorative patterns marking the beginning of each sixtieth part (*ḥizb*) of the Quran as well as its half (*nişf*), quarter, (*rub*) and eighth (*thumn*).

#### 4.5.3 Yellow ink

The yellow ink is known as *zarni*, *kurwum* or *kərnagə* (all meaning yellow in Kanuri). It is used for the disjunctive *hamza* (*hamzat al-qaṭʿ*), as well as for colour-filling the *tusu* (tri-circular verse markers), the *kumsa* (fifth-verse markers) and the *kuri* or *ashar* (tenth-verse markers).

#### 4.5.4 Green ink

The green ink is known as *kəliaram*. It is used for *libtara* (the conjunctive *hamza* or *hamzat al-waṣl*), as well as for the marginal notes dedicated to specifying the number of pauses in each sixtieth part of the Quran.

### 4.6 Board

For smooth writing, the calligraphers in Borno always prepare a suitable platform or base on which to put the paper for writing. Most calligraphers place the folio on a wooden board of the type that is normally used in the Quranic schools and sit on a mat on the floor, placing the board on their laps. Ka'ana Umar and his colleagues in the Keskari circle, however, always use a square piece of board of the type that is locally used to make house ceiling, upon which they place the paper to write. Ka'ana Umar's writing board is cut from a ceiling board.





**Fig. 10:** The *bayanaram* used by calligrapher Ka'ana Umar. © Francesco Piraino.

## 4.7 Layout marker

The layout marker used to create the margins of each page is a rectangular board made of paper and cardboard and called *bayanaram* (literally, 'marker' in Kanuri). The size of the margins is marked by four sticks (*sundok*, i.e. 'broom') sewn into the board or the paper with cotton strings. The *bayanaram* is placed by the calligrapher under the page he is preparing to write. By exercising a light pressure on the paper, the calligrapher is thus able to create a light rectangular mark that he will use as the page layout.

## 5 Leatherwork

Leatherwork has a long history in Borno, but in all likelihood, its practice was increasingly popularized with the islamization of the region, thanks to the wide availability of skins of slaughtered animals especially during the Islamic festivities. At any rate, leather work in the region is usually associated with mainly Muslim ethnic groups like Tuareg, Hausa, Kanuri and Kanembu. The hide of domestic animals like sheep, goats and cows are usually preferred, not only because of their easier availability, but also because they tend to be stronger and able to withstand the ravages of time. From the information obtained in the field, the

leather work is specifically carried out in Maiduguri by two sets of professional categories known in Kanuri as *məndəlma* and *kəlidəma*. Both professions need to be understood in their specific activities, which are vital in the traditional processes used for the preservation of Quranic (and to a lesser extent, non-Quranic) manuscripts.

### 5.1 *Məndəlma* (pl. *mundulma*, ‘tanners’)

The *mundulma* bear the task of removing the hair from the skin, using indigenous chemical elements extracted from the seeds of the *kəngar* tree. After the removal of the hair from the skin, the latter are sun-dried by the *məndəlma*, who finally takes the dried hides to the Maiduguri Monday market for sale. The profession of *məndəlma* is handed down within certain families.<sup>11</sup> Among the *mundulma* still working in Maiduguri are Alhaji Mustapha and Malam Usman, both operating at their centre in the Məndəlmari ward of Maiduguri metropolis. Their families trace their origin back to the time of Kukawa (capital of Borno from 1814 to 1907) and were given their present residence in Yerwa/Maiduguri to practice their *məndəl* profession, when the Borno leaders decided to move their capital to the new city in 1907.

### 5.2 *Kəlidəma* (pl. *kəlidəwu*, ‘dyers and leatherworkers’)

Some of the leathers used for binding and for the cases of the CCI Quran are coloured. The most prominent of the colours used is red, but yellow and green are also used in the decorations. At the Maiduguri Monday market, there is a second category of traditional craftsmen who specialize in dyeing, cutting to size and decorating the leather brought by the *məndəlma*. This category of leatherworkers is known in Kanuri as the *kəlidəma*. In the Bornuan tradition, Quranic manuscripts are left unbound, covered by a red, hard cover made by enclosing cardboard in a leather fold; they are tied with a leather cord, and finally preserved in a decorated leather satchel (*baktar* in Kanuri; *gafaka* in Hausa) provided with a strap used for hanging or carrying the volume. The *baktar* can easily be distinguished from other types of leather bags used in the region. Its use is reserved for scholars and their students, and it can contain manuscripts of the Quran, other books, various papers and writing utensils, as well as the wooden tablet used by

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<sup>11</sup> Seidensticker 1993, 197–219.



**Fig. 11:** The CCI Quran in its leather cover. © Francesco Piraino.

the Quranic students. The *baktar* is always made by a *kālidāma* and the most decorated ones are always reserved for storing and carrying copies of the Quran. The design of the *baktar* can feature various colours. In most cases the main body of the *baktar* is in a simple white/beige (*bul*) colour, with multi-coloured decorative patterns in circular or hexagonal shape appearing on the front of the satchel, as well as on its flap. Each region or place known for the production of the *baktar/gafaka* in Nigeria (Sokoto; Kano; Borno etc.) is known for its peculiar shape and design. Usually, the *baktar* from Borno appears as a harder, rectangular cube, while the *gafaka* from Sokoto and Kano is smoother and flexible. A double-twisted rope of about one-foot length is always attached to the *baktar/gafaka*.

As well as the red leather cover and the *baktar*, the CCI Quran is also preserved inside a red leather case in the form of a rectangular cube slightly smaller than the *baktar*, wrapped/closed with a long leather strip and provided with a handle. Wrapped in its leather cover, the CCI Quran is preserved in the red leather case, kept, in its turn, inside the decorated *baktar*. The leather work was commissioned by the calligrapher from a *kālidāma* based in the Maiduguri Monday market, at the cost of ten thousand Naira. This *kālidāma* is deaf and is known as Muwa, and one of the authors of the present note had to communicate with his son Abubakar who is also a trained leather worker. Abubakar pointed out that, of



**Fig. 12:** The *baktar* (left) and the leather case (right) used to preserve the CCI Quran. © Francesco Piraino.

roughly a dozen various leather items they produce, the *baktar* is the most in demand. The disruption created by the Boko Haram insurgency—as Abubakar observed—has threatened their craft, but nevertheless, they are still able to sell an average of one *baktar* per day from their shop in the market.<sup>12</sup>

## 6 Conclusion

Despite the many challenges it faces, the ancient Quranic manuscript culture of Borno is still alive today. The CCI Quran, which was produced using only local traditional techniques, testifies to such resilience. Thousands of professional and non-professional calligraphers can be found in the region of Borno today. According to Ka'ana Umar, in Maiduguri alone one can find about two thousand people who are able to write the entire Quranic *muṣḥaf* from memory, with different de-

<sup>12</sup> Mutai, interview with Abubakar, *kalidama* in the Maiduguri Monday market (Maiduguri, September 2013).

grees of quality, in the local *Barnāwī* script. In an interview with one of the authors, the calligrapher pointed out that he could identify at least five excellent calligraphic hands in the Keskari circle alone, while in the wider scholarly network of his family, he could boast about twenty such professional hands.<sup>13</sup> Today, this culture relies on the occasional commission of single manuscripts from individual sponsors. Three main factors contribute to the continuing relevance of handwritten Quranic manuscripts in Borno today: (1) the fact that for many Muslims trained in the local Quranic schools, the Eastern (*naskh*) script used in most printed editions of the Quran is either unfamiliar or aesthetically unappealing; (2) the widespread belief that a handwritten Quran carries more blessing (*baraka*) than a printed one; (3) the desire of some wealthy individuals to support what is perceived as a symbol of the cultural heritage of Borno.

One of the authors of the present note (Maimadu B. Mutai) has long been engaged in researching the history of the orthography and calligraphy of the Quran in Borno, leading to a PhD in the department of Arabic and Islamic Studies of the University of Maiduguri. The Centre for Research and Documentation in Trans-Saharan Studies, where Mutai is currently the deputy director, is continuing such research. On an international scale, the most important programme for the study of Bornuan Quranic manuscripts is the Early Nigerian Qur'anic Manuscripts project (<https://www.soas.ac.uk/africa/research/kanuri>) led by Dmitry Bondarev (previously at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, now at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, Hamburg). In recent years, some Nigerian political institutions have also started to realize the importance of such a tradition. The Commissioner for Arabic and Islamic Education of Yobe State, Alhaji Lawan Shettima, in particular, has initiated an innovative programme in the form of a yearly competition of Quranic handwriting, modelled upon the competitions of Quranic recitation that are common all over the Muslim world. In this competition, local Quranic calligraphers submit their completed copies of the entire Quranic text to a jury made up of local calligraphers, who vote the most accurately and beautifully written copy, awarding its author a prize. The effect of such an initiative is partially hampered by the strict code of conduct followed by many traditional scribes of Borno, who often avoid displaying their calligraphic work, preferring to leave it anonymous for fear of losing part of their rewards from God. Nevertheless, if they continue, such initiatives are destined to have a positive impact on the promotion of the traditional Bornuan manuscript culture, in particular among the youth, and in preserving the unique local version of the Arabic script, the *Barnāwī*.

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13 Mutai, interview with Ka'ana Umar (Maiduguri, September 2013).

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